THEY LIVED:
A BRONTË NOVEL

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By

E. THORNTON COOK

Illustrations by Thomas Fogarty

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"Indeed I cannot conceive a more perfect mode of writing any man's life, than not only relating all the most important events of it in their order, but interweaving what he privately wrote, and said, and thought; by which mankind are enabled as it were to see him live. . . ."

BOSWELL (from his *Life of Dr. Johnson*).

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NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1935

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	'The Heat of Youthful Blood'	1
II.	School Days at Roe Head	16
III.	Haworth Parsonage	22
IV.	Charlotte's First Proposal	30
V.	Difficulties	39
VI.	The Judgment of the Giants	48
VII.	The Pensionnat Heger	54
VIII.	'I know the path I ought to go!'	61
IX.	Confession	69
X.	Revolt	76
XI.	The Literary Highway	80
XII.	Plots	87
XIII.	"We are Authors!"	95
XIV.	"The Professor" and "Jane Eyre"	102
XV.	"Charlotte has Written a Book!"	111
XVI.	The Dedication	117
XVII.	To London	126
XVIII.	Death Comes to the Parsonage	130
XIX.	The "Quarterly"	142
XX.	"Shirley"	154
XXI.	'The Great Babylon'	164

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXII.	'Fine Gentlemen All'	173
XXIII.	'Saucy Pat'	185
XXIV.	Thackeray's Creed	191
XXV.	"Are you considering marriage, Charlotte?"	202
XXVI.	Heathcliff and Rochester	214
XXVII.	Visiting Miss Martineau	220
XXVIII.	Mr. Taylor Comes to Haworth	227
XXIX.	"Currer Bell! . . . Currer Bell!"	236
XXX.	'A Calm, Refined, Intellectual Treat'	242
XXXI.	Mr. Nicholls Comes to Tea	248
XXXII.	'Mon Maître!'	257
XXXIII.	Mary Taylor's Comments	264
XXXIV.	Lucy Snowe or Lucy Frost?	269
XXXV.	"The Scoundrel—the Blackguard!"	276
XXXVI.	Mr. Nicholls is Dismissed	286
XXXVII.	Holy Communion	295
XXXVIII.	Mrs. Gaskell Listens	301
XXXIX.	'Dearly Beloved'	315
	Epilogue	321

PREFACE

This is a biographical novel founded on the Brontës, or rather a reconstruction of their lives showing Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne, living and striving amid the daily round.

Thackeray comes into the tale (seen through Charlotte's eyes), also Miss Martineau, G. H. Lewes, Mrs. Gaskell, Samuel Rogers the patriarch poet, and a score more of the literary celebrities of the time.

Chronologically the book is correct, as are the reactions of the various authors to one another. Every scene of importance is founded on fact as the various editions of lives and letters (including the invaluable Shakespeare Head Brontë), the late Mr. Clement Shorter's works, and Mrs. Gaskell's famous *Life* will show. These, and the sisters' own books, are the quarries from which I have dug, as I gratefully acknowledge.

No one knows the truth in regard to Charlotte's disposal of Monsieur Heger's letters to her; the solution offered here is fiction although it may well be fact. Her letters to him were torn up and flung into a waste-paper basket by Monsieur Heger, rescued by Madame Heger, and presented to the British Museum long years after Charlotte's death by the courtesy of Monsieur Heger's son and daughter.

The book has been a delight to write. In it I have tried to be as truthful and accurate as Charlotte herself would have wished, while letting imagination give life

to those whose names are still as household words to most of us; poetic license must be asked concerning such small matters as whether the children could have read the inscriptions on the tombstones from the living-room window (they were, and are, very near) and the moment at which Emily's wild hawk found freedom.

E. T. C.

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
The four children stood in a line facing their aunt and began to read	9
"Prove that you are what we strive to believe"	91
"It is said that he is selling in monthly parts to the tune of 20,000 or 25,000 copies"	175
"Shall I tell you my creed as a literary man?" he asked her	199
Amid it all, the centre of the family and with a thousand calls upon her time, Mrs. Gaskell could write	249
Charlotte edged him gently through the door	279

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Chapter I

'THE HEAT OF YOUTHFUL BLOOD'

"'Before she knew how to turn from Evil and choose Good—God took her!'" proclaimed a red-headed boy.

"That's from the tomb of Umfray Whyttaker, gent," commented the smallest of a trio of girls who sat sewing near the fire. "'Seke in bodie, holl in myne, soull to God Almightie and bodie to St. Michael.'"

"Quite right," admitted Branwell, drumming on the window, "and the holy innocent who died so young was Alyson Whyttaker's only daughter, Jannet. I don't see the good of being born if one has to die so soon," he added argumentatively and began to chant:

"Ask not bodies doomed to die
To what abode they go.
Such knowledge is but Sorrow's Spy,
It is not safe to know!"

"I often wonder *why* Jannet died," said Anne reflectively. "The six sons lived a total of five hundred and nine years between them."

"Speaking of ages," observed Branwell, "Alyson was ninety-six before she came to be described as Umfray's 'relict.' I'd rather be an 'earthly remains' than a 'relict,' although it does sound more wormy," he added.

"You probably will be," his eldest sister assured him as she bent short-sightedly over her work. "'Relicts' are *always* wives."

Her companion pushed aside the folds of the cumbersome sheet she was helping to hem and joined her brother at the window; straining their eyes into the darkness outside the pair began one of their favourite games, each chanting in turn a text from one of the tombstones which were visible from the window of their living-room till Branwell scored a victory by deciphering a complete epitaph:

"Here lies the
Bodies of 5
Wives of William
Sunderland. Also
William Sunderland.
1790."

Left alone by the fire Charlotte and Anne drew their stools a little closer. "You taught me my letters from the Leeming tomb," said Anne in reminiscent vein as she sorted the bright-coloured wools for her sampler.

"I remember," answered Charlotte, "they lost sixteen children and we found the whole alphabet in their names and texts. I wish you would come back to your sewing, Emily Jane," she added, glancing across to the two at the window as the clock struck. "Aunt will be down soon."

"I *hate* sewing! and don't call me 'Emily Jane,' " said Emily sombrely, but she abandoned Branwell and returned unwillingly to her stool and the sheet.

"Aunt says that the making of charity garments disciplines souls, so is even more beneficial to the donor than to the recipient," observed Charlotte meditatively. "I wish our souls did not require so much discipline!"

A few minutes later the clatter of Miss Branwell's pattens sounded in the flagged passage. The three little sisters rose to drop their accustomed curtsies as she entered, and Branwell performed the nightly ritual of adjusting a footstool to his aunt's liking before withdrawing to the sanctuary of the homemade hearth-rug, there to pore over a book.

"Charlotte, I hope you have finished the length of hemming I set you yesterday?"

"Yes, Aunt Elizabeth."

"And you, Emily Jane?"

"Not yet, Aunt."

Miss Branwell took a pinch of snuff and her niece sewed swiftly. A sense of duty had brought Miss Branwell from Cornwall to this remote Yorkshire parsonage nearly eight years before when the death of his wife had left the Reverend Patrick Brontë with six children on his incapable hands, Anne, the youngest, being less than two years old.

From the beginning it was evident that the arrangement would not be an entire success, and some eighteen months after Mrs. Brontë's death the widower had made an abortive attempt to secure a second wife. Hoping to rekindle an old flame he wrote to the daughter of a former landlady explaining that he was both a wiser and a better man than he had been fifteen years before, and now, being possessed of a settled living, and a 'small but sweet family' bereft of maternal care, he suggested calling once more upon Mary Burder. But Mary re-read a bundle of old letters, decided that Providence (in the guise of Maria Branwell) had intervened to save her in the past, vetoed the suggested visit in no uncertain

phrase, and assured Mr. Brontë that the Lord would succour the bereaved family without her assistance.

The would-be lover laid aside the letter, feeling that Mary Burder was much changed for the worse. She had loved him once, without doubt—but now he had had a narrow escape. Resigning himself to the will of God he accepted his sister-in-law as a permanent member of the household.

For a time the elder children, Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte and six-year-old Emily, were sent to a school at Cowan Bridge which had been established for the benefit of the daughters of indigent clergy, who, through its agency, were to be trained as governesses, but Maria and Elizabeth returned home to die of tuberculosis, and the others were withdrawn. Now, father and aunt shared the work of educating the quartette. As Mr. Brontë practically lived in his study, even preferring to take his meals apart from his family, and Miss Branwell hated to leave her own room, the children were left to amuse themselves as they chose.

They roamed the moors, read omnivorously of the books their father had collected in his student days at Cambridge, and those obtained from the Mechanics' Institute at Keighley four miles distant, and, when these gave out, scribbled prose and verse to amuse themselves, or dreamed wildly ambitious dreams.

Their heritage was of Cornwall and Ireland; romantic lands of legendary, elfs, ghosts, fairies, smugglers and piracy.

The Cornish mother, whom Charlotte alone could remember, had met and married Patrick Brontë while on a visit to the north and had never revisited her home.

She died of cancer within nine years of the marriage (when the eldest of her six children was barely eight) and, with the meekness of the women of her generation, thanking Heaven that her husband had never given her an angry word. To the last she saw him as a man apart, handsome, virile, holy and a poet.

Of their father's ancestry the children knew little and thought vaguely.

Born in the years succeeding Waterloo they liked to know that he had volunteered to defend England against Napoleon, and believed that Lord Palmerston and their father had been comrades-in-arms. Patrick Brontë had won his way to Cambridge and ordination against incredible odds; he was one of ten children and of Irish peasant stock. In boyhood he had escaped from a weaver's loom to become a pupil teacher, thence, after long years, to the University, with seven hardly earned pounds in his pocket.

* * *

"Bring me the sheet," said Miss Branwell suddenly, and the children entangled themselves in a too speedy effort to obey.

"My spectacles, Charlotte, if you please. Emily, a candle." The last was reft from Branwell, the first extracted from the case, which, with a variety of other objects, was attached to Miss Branwell's person by black silk ribbons.

There was silence as the proffered work was scrutinized inch by inch, and Anne, who hated anyone to be unhappy, watched anxiously till her aunt nodded.

"You are improving at last, Charlotte—but it has been slow work teaching you!"

With obvious unwillingness the sisters reversed the sheet and the end hemmed by Emily was submitted for examination.

"How often must I tell you that there should *never* be more than three threads to a stitch, Emily Jane? This is a most irregular piece of work and one of which a young lady who is nearly thirteen years old should be thoroughly ashamed."

Emily shook back her dark ringlets as the lecture continued and she was bidden to unpick and re-hem a full yard.

"I'll never make a good needle-woman, Aunt Elizabeth," she protested, but the mutiny was verbal and she trailed back to her stool enveloped in sheeting.

"Sometimes I feel quite certain that none of you realize the sacrifice I made in leaving Cornwall," said Miss Branwell. "Charlotte, bring me my shawl. Anne, show me your sampler."

While Charlotte sped upon her errand Anne displayed her work:

"See, Aunt Elizabeth, I have finished 'Now in the heat of youthful blood'; to-morrow I hope to begin 'Virtue is the brightest gem a maid can wear.'"

"No, Anne, I prefer you to work from Proverbs: 'My Child, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of His correction; For whom the Lord loveth He corrects even as a father the son in whom he delighteth; Happy is the man that findeth wisdom and the man that getteth understanding. . . . She is more precious than rubies and all the things thou canst desire.'"

Anne listened in awed fascination while her aunt declaimed eighteen verses. "It will take a long time to do in cross-stitch," she commented a trifle woefully.

"Tut, tut, Anne, when I was half your age I had done the Lord's Prayer on fine linen with the apple tree of the Garden of Eden as a border, also the sampler now hanging over the bookshelf—read it, Branwell, if you please."

The boy sauntered across the room towards the wall where two elaborate samplers hung and began to chant: " 'Flee from sin as from a Serpent, for if thou becomest-too-near-it-will-*bite*-thee! The teeth thereof are as the teeth of a Lion to slay the souls of men.' "

"Oh, Branwell!" exclaimed little Anne in shocked surprise. "That is dear Mama's sampler, surely you know? Aunt Elizabeth's is the one with the flower scroll." Taking her stand beside her brother the child read aloud the words her aunt's fingers had stitched in the days of her youth:

"Charity, decent, easy,
Modest, kind,
Softens the high and
Rears the abject mind.
Not soon provoked
She easily forgives
And much she suffers
As she much believes.
Soft peace she brings
Where ever she arrives,
She builds our quiet
As she forms our lives
Lays the rough paths
Of peevish natures even,
And opens in each Heart
A little Heaven.

It is beautifully done, Aunt—there was no need for *you* to add 'I am a maid and young my skill' at the bottom of *your* work."

Anne's enthusiasm pleased Miss Branwell, as did Charlotte's careful wrapping of the shawl, and it was with a smile that she bade the girls put away their needlework and prepare for the nightly reading, a rite undertaken by her whenever Mr. Brontë was detained in the village.

"Come, Branwell, what is the book that is absorbing you?" she asked as the boy did not stir from the hearth-rug.

"Julius Cæsar.

"O that a man might know
The end of the day's business ere it come. . . ."

Anne looked over her brother's shoulder and her gentle voice read the concluding lines:

"But it sufficeth that the day will end,
And then the end is known!"

"Put Shakespeare away and fetch God's Holy Word," said Miss Branwell uncomfortably.

The four children stood in a line facing their aunt and Charlotte began to read: "The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapter One" continuing to: " 'Learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless and plead for the widow.' "

"Emily," said Miss Branwell, and slipping her arm through her sister's Emily read on. . . .

" 'Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as

The four children stood in a line facing their aunt and began to read.

white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as wool. . . .' "

"Now, Anne."

" 'If ye be willing and obedient ye shall eat the good of the land,' " read Anne in her childish treble.

"Branwell."

" 'But if ye refuse and revolt ye shall be devoured with the sword, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.' " . . . He read on, while, despite fatigue engendered by her conscientious training of the young, Miss Branwell sat stiffly upright in respect to the Word of God. When at last she held up her hand as a sign that the remaining words of the prophet might be left until the morrow the girls curtsied her 'good-night' and she went click-clacking up the stairs to the welcome solitude of her own room.

A spurt of activity showed itself below. Charlotte pulled the square mahogany table near to the fire and set the candle at one end, Anne pushed the chairs forward, Emily produced a pile of notebooks and Branwell dealt out freshly sharpened pencils. He was first into place at the table, and, squaring his elbows, began to scribble.

"Write very, very small, Branwell," counselled Charlotte, her brow furrowed with anxiety. "I don't know when we shall be able to afford any more paper."

"What is your new story to be called?" asked Anne as she scrambled into place beside him.

"The Liar Detected—by Captain Budd."

"Oh, Branwell, that sounds thrilling," cried Emily admiringly.

"I have catalogued all I have written," said Char-

lotte, "there are twenty-two volumes—'The Search After Happiness,' 'The Bridal Day,' the 'Manuscript of an Unfortunate Author'——"

"I've written a lot too," interrupted Branwell. "My 'Letters from an Englishman' is almost finished, and 'Love and Warfare' alone makes six volumes."

"We *all* know how clever you are, Branwell dear," said Anne, putting an arm round his neck. "Oh, won't it be splendid when you are a famous author or artist —or both—and the whole world knows that you are our brother!"

Charlotte opened her little penny notebook and leant close to the candle. "Listen, and tell me if you think this is a good beginning for my third chapter: 'One evening the Duke of Wellington was writing in his room at Downing Street. He was reposing at his ease in a simple easy chair and smoking a homely pipe, for he disdained the modern frippery of cigars'——"

Intent on the tale none of the four paid any attention to the entrance of their sturdy Yorkshire servant Tabitha Arkroyd, till, having poked the fire into a blaze, she seized and blew out their candle, nor would she yield it despite a protesting outcry.

Anne's coaxing, Branwell's blandishments and the entreaties of Charlotte and Emily fell on deaf ears.

"I'll ha' na waste in this house," said Tabitha resolutely, "and waste it is, burning good candles for your writings."

"But Tabby," protested Charlotte, "we must practise for we are all going to be authors some day."

"Charlotte is writing a beautiful story now!" cried Anne.

"She is! Indeed she is, and so is Branwell," said Emily. "Tabitha, do *please* let us have our candle!"

"You'll get na candle from me and th's that," said Tabitha with her hands on her hips, "and you can put up your litter for it's near supper-time."

There was no gainsaying Tabitha in that mood and all knew it.

"I did want to hear what the Duke of Wellington was going to do," said Emily with a sigh.

Tabitha retired with the honours of war but only to return with a tray of mugs and a saucepan which she balanced carefully on the hob before drawing a chair to the fire and beginning to knit.

"Ya ma go t' bed," she told Branwell when he complained that he did not know what to do without a light, nor would she respond when Anne begged her to tell them one of her stories of the days when she was young.

"Packhorses went through the Yorkshire dales then, and people saw fairies by Sladen Beck," Emily reminded her.

"T'railroads have driven them away," said Tabitha sourly. "Na, na, you must make out for yourselves t'night."

Complaining of her glumness the children gathered on the hearth-rug to sup their mugs of 'skilly,' but Charlotte raised their drooping spirits by suggesting a game of 'let's pretend,' in which each should own an island.

"The Isle of Man, for me!" cried Branwell.

"Arran," said Emily, "and Sir Walter Scott with Johnny Lockhart to live on it with me."

"Guernsey," said Anne, and joined in the indignant outcry that assailed Charlotte when she made a clean sweep of all the family heroes to people the Isle of Wight.

"The Duke of Wellington, Mr. Abernethy, Admiral Horatio Viscount Nelson Duke of Brontë, leader of the might of England, commander of her strength on the deep—hurler of her thunder over the seas!" she declaimed breathlessly.

"Enough of your nonsense," interrupted Tabitha. "T'bed now!" But the quartette turned upon her as one.

"*No,* Tabitha!"

"It's Charlotte's last night at home before she goes to Roe Head," said Anne, on the verge of tears.

"Another five minutes," conceded Tabitha, gathering up the mugs and retreating to her kitchen.

"I have been trying to forget it all day," said Charlotte forlornly. "I hate—I loathe—the thought of going to school again—but one cannot *get on* without learning!"

"I would give anything to go, yet I am kept at home," said Branwell.

"You never went to Cowan Bridge," [1] Emily reminded him. "How would you have liked to pray every day: 'O God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, vouchsafe to look upon and hear an infant's prayer! I am a child of wrath and my understanding is dark, my will is perverse and my affections are corrupt before Thee!' I was six years old," she added breaking off.

[1] 'Lowood' of "Jane Eyre."

"I remember the hymns better than the prayers," said Charlotte:

"How swiftly roll the circling years
Though few on us have shed their ray,
But e'en to us the time appears
In silence to fly swift away.

This is, indeed, a solemn thought
And well it now becomes to think,
For we, unthinking, might be brought
Young as we are—to life's last link!

How many little infants die!
And some of us who worship here,
Before this present year goes by
May chance be laid upon our bier!

It was an *accursed* place. Maria and Elizabeth might have been alive now but for that unforgettable school. We were cold, we were hungry—I can smell the hateful burnt porridge now! Some day——"

"You are being what Aunt would call 'vindictive,'" observed Branwell judiciously. "We are none of us particularly robust, so Maria and Elizabeth might have died if they had never left home, and before you threaten anything I think you had better remember another of that black marble clergyman's favourite hymns:

"'Tis dangerous to provoke a God
Whose power and vengeance none can tell
One stroke of his almighty rod
Can send young sinners quick to *Hell!*"

"T'bed wi' ye, I say!" said Tabitha, re-entering.

Chapter II

SCHOOL DAYS AT ROE HEAD

Charlotte Brontë was fourteen years old when her father took her to Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head, and the twenty miles between it and the moorland parsonage seemed interminable leagues to the child as she jolted about in a covered cart which had been the only vehicle procurable at Haworth; yet she dreaded the ordeal of arrival.

Emerging, cold and nervous, to face the battery of a dozen pairs of eyes, she became acutely aware that her rusty green frock was as old-fashioned as herself.

During the first few days Charlotte's tears flowed fast. She longed passionately to be back in the stone parsonage which stood foursquare to the raging winds above the bleakly set, black village of Haworth. What matter pouring rain, mists that blotted out every vista save the tall church tower and the mouldering tombs? Emily and Branwell and Anne were there in the warmth of the living-room—they made her world. If the house were sparsely furnished and isolated Charlotte had no standard of comparison. At least it contained the literary stimuli of books, newspapers and eager young minds, and behind it stretched the ever-changing panorama of the heather-clad moors high among the higher, encircling hills.

It was difficult for Charlotte to find her level in this new environment.

An entry made eight years before in the Register at Cowan Bridge might well have been re-written by Miss Wooler:

'Charlotte Brontë . . . writes indifferently, ciphers a little, works neatly but knows nothing of grammar, history, geography or accomplishments. Clever for her age but unsystematic . . .'

Yet could a child be placed among the juniors when she was capable of discussing the political questions of the day, understood the Corn Laws and quoted Holy Writ with embarrassing aptness? Sadly perplexed, Miss Wooler awaited the slow drying of Charlotte's tears. A week or so later when the other children were enjoying a decorous game of 'French and English' (the period was sixteen years after Waterloo), and Charlotte had hidden herself away in the empty schoolroom, a late pupil arrived to help the process. Having taken stock of her surroundings the new-comer discovered Charlotte shrinking into the shelter of the window curtains, and checked her own rising tears to inquire the cause of the other's grief.

"Is it that you are home sick?" she asked.

"Ye-es," said Charlotte.

"I am too," admitted the other child, "and I think I'll cry also in a minute."

Obvious seniority compelled Charlotte to force a wintry smile and the younger girl gathered courage.

"My name is Ellen Nussey," she volunteered, "and my birthday is on the twenty-first of April."

"I am Miss Charlotte Brontë, and *my* birthday is on the twenty-first of April!"

Struck by this amazing coincidence the two sat hand

in hand and the seeds of a long friendship were planted in the sympathetic silence before the other girls came decorously back to the schoolroom.

Sallow of complexion, thin to emaciation, diminutive in person, with an over-large nose and a slightly crooked mouth, others thought Charlotte ugly, but Ellen saw her delicacy of line and luminous eyes—eyes that were so short-sighted that Charlotte could never catch a ball.

But if she were useless in games Charlotte held her own at night in the dormitory, for she had brought with her her talent for 'making out,' and could hold the girls enthralled.

When her imagination worked upon an upper, unused floor of the school, peopling it with ghosts, her companions thrilled and one so lost her nerve that she screamed hysterically.

"Call Miss Wooler!" commanded the terrified narrator, and half a dozen frightened children ran to do her bidding. The worthy schoolmistress arrived in dressing-gown and slippers, scolded everyone, and was amazed to find that 'good little Charlotte Brontë' was at the root of the trouble; no one had expected *her* to be guilty of 'late talking.'

At the end of the first half-year Charlotte carried home three prizes, and when she returned to school she came without tears. Something of the passion that had sent her father from the loom to school, and from school to Cambridge, was burning in her; she was avid for knowledge, hungry for beauty, and determined to 'get on.' The Cowan Bridge Register had marked her as a future governess, but first, as Charlotte knew, she

was to serve an apprenticeship by passing on the knowledge acquired at Roe Head to Emily and Anne now industriously hemming and dusting under the eye of Miss Branwell, and, when left free, filling the penuriously acquired little notebooks with unactable plays, and helping Branwell illustrate his latest 'thriller'—"The Revenge: A Tragedy by Young Soult the Rhymer."

The other girls listened to Charlotte's account of life at the parsonage and found it sombre for, by the magic of her gift she carried them with her up the steep village street, past the Black Bull Inn, through the crowded graveyard wherein Wesley had preached to tense thousands, and so to the silent house on the moor edge that was her home.

"You are like potatoes living in a cellar," said robust Mary Taylor.

"That's just it—we are," answered Charlotte, nor could she be stirred to further speech until someone mentioned her favourite hero the Duke of Wellington and his attitude on the question of Catholic Emancipation.

"I remember the day when the 'Intelligence Extraordinary' came with Mr. Peel's speech in it announcing the terms upon which the Catholics were to be admitted!" exclaimed Charlotte in sudden animation. "Papa tore off the cover and we gathered round breathless with anxiety as one by one they were disclosed. Aunt Elizabeth thought it was all excellent, and that the Catholics could do no harm with such security. . . . And then the doubts whether it would pass the Lords! It was dreadful to read of the opening of the door—

the hush—and the great Duke in his green sash and waistcoat rising to speak . . . Papa said that his words were like precious gold."

"I suppose you would say that the Duke of Wellington was a very clever man," interrupted a bored companion.

"Clever!" flashed out Charlotte indignantly. "You don't know the meaning of the word. A man like—like Sheridan might be called *clever*—yes, he was—scamps often are, but——"

"What about Dr. Johnson?"

"Johnson hadn't a spark of *cleverality* in him," said Charlotte earnestly, "and as for the Duke——"

But the wisdom the child might have uttered was lost in the general laughter over the word she had coined in her eagerness, and Ellen Nussey drew her friend away.

Charlotte's last day at school arrived. Eighteen months had passed and soon she would be sixteen years old; she felt inconceivably wise, but in all the eighteen months she had acquired but one solitary bad mark, and now, looking back, she felt that, if she had succeeded scholastically, she had missed something in other ways. To-morrow she would be an elder sister complete with prizes, a silver 'Emulation' medal and the career of governess stretching before her.

"To-day, just for once, I should like to feel an out-and-out schoolgirl!" said Charlotte, flinging aside the sense of responsibility that weighted her youth.

But Ellen was not equal to offering a dramatic suggestion and in the realms of actual wickedness Charlotte's imagination failed.

"Let us—let us run round the fruit garden," said Charlotte in default of worse lawlessness. They ran.

On the morrow the covered cart carried Miss Brontë back to Haworth.

Chapter III

HAWORTH PARSONAGE

Life had begun. With the educational advantages secured at Cowan Bridge and Roe Head Charlotte was now considered well equipped to prepare Emily and Anne for their intended avocations.

'An account of one day is an account of all,' she wrote to the friend of her heart. 'In the morning from nine till half-past twelve I instruct my sisters and draw; then we walk till dinner. After dinner I sew till tea-time, and after tea I either read, write, do fancy-work, or draw as I please.' It was not a programme of thrilling events and the writer grieved because Ellen Nussey might think the epistle scarcely worth the postage which she would have to pay.

When one was engulfed in such routine the novelty of an adult life soon wore off and Charlotte was flung back upon herself.

During her absence Emily and Anne had learnt to do without her; they were absorbed in some secret writing game of their own concerning a people called the Gondals who dwelt on an imaginary island in the South Pacific, and though the pair listened politely to their elder sister's tales of happenings at Roe Head it was obvious that the adventures of the Emperor of the Gondals was of greater importance.

Branwell, too, had found new interests; once Char-

lotte and he had rivalled Emily and Anne with a never-ending Angrian tale, but now he slipped away, so soon as his lessons with his father were over, to attend the meetings of some village club, or talk to John Brown the sexton.

There were few visits to pay for Haworth was not given to sociability, and Mr. Brontë understood his parishioners who approved of him in that he let other folk's business alone. Once, indeed, they had eyed him askance, suspicious that he was guilty of shaving himself on the Sabbath day, but there had been no more trouble since 't'parson' had proved that a monthly week-day clip was all that he indulged in. Occasionally the sisters would be called upon to entertain the Sunday-school teachers, yet more occasionally a clergyman or curate from a neighbouring parish would appear to be ushered into the study there to discuss delinquency; for the rest there was no more excitement than a walk into Keighley, a climb to Top Withens[1] or the arrival of the Jews' Basket. An earthquake could scarcely have disturbed the household more than did a letter from Ellen Nussey suggesting that Charlotte might visit her while she was staying at Ryddings, the home of an uncle who at one time had been a court physician.

"Impossible!" declared Mr. Brontë.

"Not to be thought of," added Miss Branwell.

"But I want to go!" pleaded Charlotte. "Oh, Papa—Oh, Aunt Elizabeth?"

"It is over twenty miles distant," said Mr. Brontë.

"Papa, I could travel by coach."

"No, Charlotte, not to pay a visit," said Miss Bran-

[1] Site of "Wuthering Heights."

well, her sense of propriety outraged, "and not without an escort. Preposterous!"

The subject had to be dropped for the moment, but Charlotte's eagerness remained unabated and a week later she ventured to renew the attack. In the end she triumphed and was sent off in Haworth's only genteel vehicle, a two-wheeled gig, with Branwell in attendance.

"A fortnight will be amply sufficient for you to remain since Miss Nussey has kindly asked you for a month," said Miss Branwell; "a well-bred visitor should always be fearful of tiring her hostess."

Charlotte was comparatively travelled, having been to Cowan Bridge and Roe Head, but never before had Branwell moved a dozen miles from his home. The journey seemed a wonderful experience and the boy vowed that he was leaving his sister in Paradise.

To Charlotte the visit was not an unalloyed delight; shyness tied her tongue, strangers awed her, and it was only when she was alone with Ellen that she was genuinely happy, but she returned home with a rich store of memories. Ryddings had wide lawns, a rookery, and a turret roof; years later she added to its glories imaginatively, borrowed the panelled hall and musicians' gallery from Oakwell Hall[1] (as seen with Miss Wooler), and gave all to "Shirley."

For the present she was more concerned to send a return invitation to Ellen, but Miss Branwell argued that no visitor would be able to endure the rigours of Haworth except in June, and the season being late, Midsummer Day passed before Charlotte was permitted to write:

1 'Fieldhead' of "Shirley."

'Papa now desires me to present his respects to Mrs. Nussey and say that he should feel greatly obliged if she would allow us the pleasure of your company for a few weeks.' . . .

Ellen came and all the family did her honour. Mr. Brontë met her in the lane at the top of the steep village street. Miss Branwell urged her to rest after the fatigue of the twenty-mile journey, Branwell carried in her carpet-bag, Emily and Anne smiled a welcome, and Charlotte clung to her, crying: "Dear, dear Ellen! I love you better than ever!" Ellen felt disloyal when her startled eyes noted the bleak bareness of the uncarpeted rooms and uncurtained windows, all of which seemed to look on to the graveyard.

But the girl adapted herself easily to the life of the parsonage; even Tabby came to accept her as one of the 'childer.' She listened to Miss Branwell's tales of Penzance so prettily that the little lady sometimes forgot that her audience was not of her own generation and would offer the girl a pinch of snuff from the gold box hanging at her side. She never even smiled when Brown the sexton (who paraded the aisles during Sunday services) awoke sleepers with a blow from the nobbly stick he carried. Nor did Mr. Brontë's habit of firing off in the morning the pistol he had loaded overnight, disturb her equanimity, and when Tabby called the 'childer' to peel potatoes, or Charlotte was bidden to wind white silk for Mr. Brontë's private sewings, Ellen's nimble fingers worked as swiftly as her friend's.

"He prefers to cover his white cravats himself," explained Charlotte, "and we don't quite know how he does it, for they seem to be growing higher and higher."

"Papa has a very delicate throat," observed Anne sedately as she bent over the charity needlework Miss Branwell still considered beneficial. Emily had rebelled long since, or perhaps the aunt had found herself unequal to the task of teaching such reluctant fingers the art of hemming. Branwell stood frowning before his easel, vainly trying to catch Charlotte's elusive expression as she gave Ellen good counsel.

"The sin is not in the *movement,* but in the consequences that usually attend dancing," she explained, choosing her words carefully in an effort to be broad-minded. "There is the frivolity, and the waste of valuable time to be considered. Papa wrote of it as a 'carnal amusement' in his book the 'Maid of Killarney,' but *I* cannot help feeling that, just for an hour, among young people who want exercise, it should be permissible," she added wistfully.

"Does your father write books?" asked awestruck Ellen.

"He has written four," answered Charlotte. "Two were books of poems, but 'The Cottage in the Wood or the Art of Becoming Rich and Happy' and 'The Maid' were novels. He has never written anything but sermons since Mama died," she added.

"Do you remember your mother?" asked Ellen, feeling that she ought to show herself sympathetic.

"I try and try," said Charlotte, "but I was only five years old when she died." She dropped the silk and pressed her hands against her eyes in an effort of memory. "I think I can see her in the firelight—just once—sitting on this old horse-hair-covered sofa of ours playing with Branwell. Poor little mother—it

must have been difficult to leave six small children."

"I believe that Anne is the only one of you with a paintable face," said Branwell, flinging down his brush, "yet Emily is the best looking," he added critically.

"Leave the masterpiece for to-day and let's go out," said Emily. "Keeper—a walk!"

Silent, almost morose indoors, Emily now took the lead and Ellen Nussey watched her with amazement as she led the way up the slippery track to a waterfall, and then, while Branwell jumped from end to end of the rail-less stone bridge laid for the convenience of pack-horses, and the others sought for mosses among the crags, perched herself on a favourite boulder, to the top of which Ellen would never have ventured. Unimaginative as the girl was, she realized something of Emily's passionate love for the wide moors and the unbroken line of surrounding, over-arching sky. She seemed to know every bird that crossed their path, and held the others back for fear of frightening a lapwing, explaining that it was flying to its nest since the clouds had touched the swells and it felt rain in the air. A moment later she had scrambled down to the beck to jump from stone to stone and try to catch the minnows as they wriggled their way through the brown waters. Nor did she show fear of an occasional ram that offered to dispute the way over the brow of the moor on the circuit home.

Tabby had cakes hot on the griddle when the five hastened over the field path and down the narrow lane to the parsonage, and after tea all gathered near the fire, Emily nursing the cat till jealous Keeper nosed her off.

At eight o'clock Mr. Branwell came to read prayers.

At nine he looked into say good night before going slowly upstairs, pausing on the way to wind the clock, but the five lingered, for Branwell had brought out his canvases from the store-room, which had been converted into a studio despite much grumbling from Tabitha, and talked of becoming an art student in London. He stood in the firelight, alert, eager, flinging back his tawny hair as he spoke of his ambitions, and Charlotte, Emily and Anne looked at him with shining eyes while he jotted down the rough draft of an application for admission to the Royal Academy Schools on the back of one of his own poems. All saw him as one famous and admired; no one doubted his genius.

"T'bed, childer, t'bed!" said Tabitha once again, and they sprang up laughing.

"Let's pretend that we are back at Miss Wooler's, Ellen," exclaimed Charlotte. "'Four times round the table, girls.'" And linking her arm through her friend's she led the way. Emily and Anne followed, and Charlotte sang softly:

> "What way does the wind come? What way
> does he go?"

Anne's clear thin treble took up her favourite lines to be followed by Emily and Branwell:

> "He rideth over the water and over the snow.
>
> Through wood and through vale,
> And over the rocky heights which God cannot climb
> Takes his sounding flight. . . .
>
> But how he comes and whither he goes
> Never a scholar in England knows! . . .

"Good night, Tabby!"

The old woman watched them as they climbed the uncarpeted flagged stairs. Yes, her 'childer' were 'larn'd,' and as for Miss Ellen Nussey she did not know when she had seen anyone she liked better.

Chapter IV

CHARLOTTE'S FIRST PROPOSAL

Monotonous days lengthened into weeks, months, years, but at the isolated parsonage beneath Haworth Moor there was no other excitement than that enjoyed vicariously when Ellen Nussey went to London. Charlotte thought that such an adventure was enough to turn any girl's head (except Ellen's), and Emily and Anne, busy picking precious currants from the few stunted bushes in their wind-swept garden, listened with awe to their sister's account of her friend's (probable) experiences. She must have seen the Palace of St. James where England's kings had held court through centuries, and, perhaps, the great Duke of Wellington!

But plans talked over for years suddenly materialized and happenings began in their own immediate circle. It was decided that Branwell should seek fame in London, and, as this would be a drain on the slender resources of the family, Charlotte's decision to begin without further delay the career that had been mapped out for her since she was eight years old, was generally approved. If not quite nineteen she ranked as an accomplished and experienced governess. Had she not been educated at two schools—and taught her own sisters? Another asset was the fact that she was the

daughter of a clergyman. Soon Charlotte had a choice of three posts—two with private families, and one at Roe Head, where it was suggested that Emily might accompany her to be 'finished' by Miss Wooler in her turn; this offer was accepted.

The novelty of independence helped Charlotte over the first few months, and, if pupils were dull, there were compensations. Old school friendships were renewed and Mary Taylor welcomed her at the "Red House," [1] where Charlotte learnt that political affairs could be viewed from other angles than her own and noted many a curious Yorkshire trait to be turned to good account in future years. Market day offered another excitement, for there was always a possibility that a white packet would come flashing over the wall as one of Ellen Nussey's brothers drove by, or else Ellen herself might appear.

The schoolmistress was very apparent in Charlotte these days and she strove to direct Ellen's literary taste.

"You must read Milton, Thomson, Goldsmith, Pope, Byron, Wordsworth and Southey, as well as Shakespeare," she said firmly.

"Oh, Charlotte!—Byron and Shakespeare!"

"Don't be startled, Ellen. Byron and Shakespeare were both great men and their works are like themselves. You will know how to choose the good and avoid the bad," she added; "the finest passages are always the purest, the bad are invariably revolting."

But timid Ellen remained unconvinced, and on further consideration Charlotte allowed her to omit 'Cain,' and Shakespeare's comedies; Ellen must take her word

[1] "Briarmains" of "Shirley."

for it that the remainder could be read fearlessly.

"And fiction?" asked Ellen.

"Scott," answered Charlotte dogmatically. "All novels after his are worthless." The young adviser was equally sure of her ground in the realms of history and biography; only on the subject of divinity did her self-confidence fail her, and Ellen was advised to apply to her brother Henry, now about to be ordained.

Emily was less fortunate than Charlotte. She missed her freedom and the moors; visits were anguish and she held herself away from proffered friendship. As the weeks passed she grew thinner, whiter and more silent and within three months had reached the limit of her endurance. So complete was her breakdown that she had to be sent home; Anne took her sister's vacated place at Roe Head and carried away Watt's "On the Improvement of the Mind" as a prize for good conduct at the end of her first term.

For a space all went well, then the glamour of the new life began to fade where Charlotte was concerned. Routine tasks tired her, dulling the creative faculty, but left her restless and dissatisfied. She discovered that her salary did little more than clothe herself and Anne, yet what better could she do? Mary Taylor, to whom Charlotte turned for advice, could offer no suggestions; she, too, was craving Opportunity and was more tied than Charlotte, since her brothers disapproved of their sisters going 'out.'

To make matters worse, it seemed probable that Ellen Nussey would leave the neighbourhood and Charlotte grew frantic. Analysing herself she discovered that her heart was 'a hotbed of sinful thoughts'—perhaps she

had been contaminating Ellen's white mind and the threatened separation was the direct act of God! She prayed desperately and wrote urging Ellen to reinforce these 'polluted petitions' with her own pure requests.

The two had hoped to spend part of the Christmas holidays together, but Tabitha had an accident and Miss Branwell vetoed visitors while the old servant lay with a broken leg.

"I'll never set my heart on anything again!" vowed Charlotte.

Branwell was at home and as dissatisfied as his sister. London had not proved itself the city of his dreams, and, for some unexplained reason, he had not become an Academy student. Indeed the whole affair was smothered in mystery, and if Branwell gave an explanation to his father he left his sisters' curiosity unsatisfied. As far as Charlotte could see the only result of the adventure was that Branwell had acquired a file of "Bell's Life," and it was not until the end of the holidays that she and he patched up their old alliance.

Somewhat scornful that Emily and Anne seemed content to fill their notebooks with tales of the mysterious Gondals, Charlotte and Branwell conceived the idea of submitting their own literary efforts to the judgment of a literary giant.

"It must be someone from whose verdict there can be no appeal," said Branwell, although he was less sanguine than Charlotte in anticipating a reply. A year previously he had offered to write for "Blackwood's Magazine," but his proposal to contribute a series of articles superior to anything that had hitherto appeared in 'Maga's' pages had been ignored.

"I will send a set of verses to Robert Southey the Poet Laureate," decided Charlotte, aiming high.

"Then I will write to Mr. Wordsworth. He is to me a divinity of the mind," said Branwell. The letters were posted and brother and sister waited on edge with anxiety.

"Surely, in this day when there is not a writing poet worth sixpence in the field, the way must open if a better man steps forward," argued the boy. But the days passed and no answer came to his appeal.

In a Westmorland cottage the poets compared the letters. Wordsworth flung Branwell's epistle aside, disgusted by what he considered open flattery of himself and flippancy in regard to other men's achievements, but Southey, who had not forgotten the day when he was young, wrote to warn Charlotte that although she possessed a certain faculty of verse the world was a competitive place and he saw no hope for her future.

Literature could not and should not be the business of a woman's life; if engaged in her proper pursuits she would have no leisure for it. Let her use her gift for her own pleasure if she would, but not with a view to gaining celebrity, so said Southey.

The letter reached Charlotte on her twenty-first birthday and after her return to Roe Head. She endorsed it 'to be kept for ever,' feeling that frequent re-readings might help her to suppress ambition if ever again she felt a wild desire to see her name in print.

Miss Wooler removed her school to Dewsbury Moor. Ellen Nussey went into the great world of London once more; Emily, caught in the web of circumstance, became a teacher in a school near Halifax; Branwell

sought escape from the over-silent parsonage in the conveniently situated Black Bull Inn; Charlotte found her days consisted of unending lessons, and Anne fell ill—so ill that Charlotte was terrified and saw the ghosts of Maria and Elizabeth pressing around her sister's bed.

In no mood to hear reason she accused Miss Wooler of callous disregard for her pupil's health, and the good lady wrote a tear-stained letter to Mr. Brontë, who arrived to carry off his daughters. Although Charlotte returned to teach for a few more months the bond of friendship that had existed between her and Miss Wooler was sadly strained; both found the position untenable and Charlotte left Dewsbury without regret.

The three sisters were together once more at Haworth, for Emily had decided that independence could be bought too dearly. Never again, no, not for all the riches of the Indies, would she submit to be imprisoned in a schoolroom. Rather would she bake and brew and clean at home, claiming freedom to roam at will with her dog once the household tasks were done. Let the moors be purple, russet, or buried deep beneath a heavy fall of snow, she loved them. It was good to take shelter in the heather from a whirling storm of hail that left the world white, or to stand high, defying the buffeting winds, watching the fast-drifting clouds or the fitful passage of a gleam of sunlight making swift advance across the misty valleys.

But Charlote turned from the endless folds of imprisoning hills and would find no happiness in the wide arc of sullen sky.

"We have come to a dead end," she said drearily when trying to make New Year resolutions, and there

flashed into her mind a set of verses which she had been compelled to learn at Cowan Bridge:

Now another year is gone,
I'm nearer come to Death—
While the year is pressing on
Let me notice what it saith!

Of each season you must give
An account to God at last.
Every moment that you live
Should to some good end be pass'd.

Time mis-spent is spent in sin,
And when all your life is o'er,
Knowing what you should have been
Is no use, when Time's no more!

But when the March winds swept the valleys clear of mist a way of escape opened in a most unexpected direction. That Henry Nussey whom Charlotte had once recommended as an adviser on sacred literature, secured a modest curacy and decided to add to his income by taking pupils. As a prelude it was necessary to secure a serviceable wife, so Henry wrote to Charlotte; her correspondents being few she paid the postage on the unexpected letter with some misgiving, and found the contents surprising.

Mr. Nussey explained his need, then, with devastating honesty, confessed that his first approach had been to his vicar's daughter, 'a steady, sensible, and—I trust—a good girl.' Three days since, according to an entry in Mr. Nussey's notebook, the vicar (not the lady) had sent a hostile reply. Secure in his faith that God

knew what was best for the individual, His Church and His own glory, Mr. Nussey became aware that the loss was providential—"So I turn to you, Miss Brontë."

A wave of excitement swept over Charlotte. If she married Henry, Ellen might live with her for ever and ever! The temptation was strong and she allowed herself to contemplate the glorious prospect till Conscience rebuked her. Was love of the sister sufficient excuse for marrying the brother? Could she make him happy? Would he be dismayed when he discovered how different was the 'real' Charlotte from the correct 'Miss Brontë' of his imaginings? Henry Nussey was good, amiable and well-disposed, but she could not adore him, and in her heart of hearts Charlotte believed herself to be capable of fire. 'Yet, ten to one, I shall never have the chance again!' she thought miserably. 'Oh, Ellen, Ellen!'

But Charlotte Brontë was not the daughter of a clergyman for nothing; after an hour's deliberation she saw her way plain, and with paper held close to her shortsighted eyes, she bent to the task of answering her first love-letter:

'My Dear Sir,' wrote Charlotte. 'You are aware that I have many reasons to feel grateful to your family, and that I have a particular affection for at least one of your sisters, also that I highly esteem yourself—do not, therefore, accuse me of wrong motives when I say that my answer to your proposal must be a decided negative.' . . .

With infinite care she drew the portrait of a suit-

able bride; Mr. Nussey should marry a maiden of undoubted piety, even temper, cheerful spirit, and 'such personal attractions as would please the eye.'

In conclusion Charlotte essayed to sketch herself and then rounded off the epistle:

'I scorn deceit,' she explained, 'and never, for the sake of attaining the distinction of matrimony, and escaping the stigma of "old maid," will I take a worthy man whom I am conscious I cannot render happy. . . . Farewell, I shall always be glad to hear from you as a *friend*.'

It was done. She looked at the letter and thought: 'If he were a clever man, and loved me, the whole world weighed in the balance against his smallest wish would be light as air. . . . Oh, Ellen! Ellen!'

Chapter V

DIFFICULTIES

The Wheel turned another cog. On an April day Anne, whitefaced but resolute, drove away to Mirfield, having been engaged as governess by Mrs. Ingham of Blake Hall, and a month later Charlotte secured her first private situation. She went to Mrs. Sidgwick at Stone Gappe,[1] some four miles from Skipton.

Anne endured silently and found what happiness she could in a dream world of her own creating. Charlotte held her post just two months, and perhaps employer and employee were equally thankful when the engagement terminated. As a nursery governess Charlotte Brontë proved sadly incompetent; she never saw when a small child's nose required the application of a handkerchief, or when its shoe-laces trailed in the mud; nor when it ought to be lifted into a high chair. She could not manage her charges without appeal to a higher authority and their constant presence racked her nerves.

Her sole accomplishment (as seen by Mrs. Sidgwick) was a capacity for fine sewing; but she showed no willingness to exercise this talent, hemmed nightcaps unwillingly, and regarded a request to dress dolls as a grievance. When taken to task for her woebegone appearance Charlotte dissolved into tears. She wept

[1] 'Gateshead Hall' of "Jane Eyre."

because no one understood her, or wished to understand her.

"The cup of life as it is mixed for the class called governess is a bitter draught!" declared Charlotte on reaching the haven of the parsonage once more, but though she might fulminate against a family 'proud as a peacock, wealthy as a Jew,' she was the richer for her experience, having seen a house-party in being if only from a dependant's angle; and she had visited Norton Conyers and heard a vague story of a maniacal woman who had set it afire. Charlotte Brontë had a retentive memory.

For the moment she could think of nothing but an invitation from Ellen who had conceived the bold project of carrying her friend off for a month at the sea, and once again a battle had to be fought though Charlotte was now of an age when she was expected to earn her own living. The elders still shook their heads over the difficulties of travel, but Charlotte was resolute, indeed she suggested walking to Ellen's home, if need be, or coaching to Leeds and meeting her friend at an inn.

"Unladylike!" cried Miss Branwell with uplifted hands.

"Impossible," declared Mr. Brontë.

"You travelled all the way from Cornwall to Yorkshire," Charlotte reminded her aunt.

"My dear," said Miss Branwell, deeply shocked, "that was of necessity and I was escorted by a married lady and gentleman belonging to my own church." She took a pinch of snuff to quell her agitation. "I knew trouble would come when we permitted you to go to Ryddings."

"I am twenty-three years old and times have changed," persisted Charlotte. "Young ladies can now do many things that were impossible in your day, Aunt Elizabeth."

"Charlotte, that is no way to speak to your aunt," said Mr. Brontë severely, "and it is time for prayers."

Charlotte apologized, laid the Bible before her father, listened to the reading, and rose from her knees after prayers. to carry on the argument. Victory went to youth. She wrote joyfully to Ellen and in the succeeding days washed, ironed and packed her scanty supply of garments; indeed, she was so blithe and laughed so kindly at the jests of a visiting curate that he laid his heart at her feet after a single interview.

Charlotte was dismayed. She had no inclination to accept Mr. Price, or was his name Bryce?—yet felt that this second offer sealed her fate as an old maid. A third chance of matrimony was scarcely likely to come her way; so she meditated, while making beds, sweeping, dusting, till the hour came when the gig should be engaged to carry her to Ellen.

Unsuspectingly, she met her father as he came up the hill from the village and heard that Haworth's solitary vehicle had been sent under contract to Harrogate; no man knew the date of its return. Charlotte could not go.

With unqualified relief Mr. Brontë retracted the permission that had been wrested from him against his judgment, and Miss Branwell saw it all as the will of a far-sighted Providence.

A chastened Charlotte poured out her woes on paper. In reply Ellen arrived, having borrowed a

carriage, overcame opposition, swept up her friend with what garments remained in the half-packed carpet-bag, and carried her off on an amazing journey by coach, rail and fly to a farm at Easton.

For the first time in their lives the two were free. They could go where they liked when they liked, and talk as they pleased.

They walked to Bridlington and saw the sea, which so overcame Charlotte that Ellen had to leave her while she recovered her self-control, and, greatly daring, they moved to seaside lodgings. It was the culminating moment of the great experience. The pair ate with sparing caution, but ruin faced them in a week, and they retreated to Easton, where intimate confidences could be exchanged in an atmosphere less financially harassing.

Ellen had an eligible but unattractive suitor and asked for counsel, but Charlotte's experience as a governess had convinced her that her friend would be happier married than venturing after independence.

"Don't accept if you are *certain* you can't tolerate a man, Ellen, but on the other hand don't refuse because you cannot adore him. It is better to marry *to* love, than to marry *for* love. Indeed, no young lady should fall in love till six months after marriage, and then only with precaution, coldly, moderately, *rationally*. . . . If ever she loves so much that a harsh word or a cold look from her husband cuts her to the heart, she is a fool, and if ever she loves so much that she watches her husband's wishes to make his will law, she becomes a neglected fool! Mediocrity in all things is wisdom; mediocrity in the senses is superlative wis-

dom. '*Une grande passion*' is '*une grande folie.*' Remember that, Ellen."

Ellen shivered. Charlotte was her senior and wiser far than she, but home life had its problems and this doctrine left her cold.

"Believe me, Ellen," said Charlotte, aware of her friend's attitude. "The majority of those worldly precepts which repel us in youth are founded in wisdom."

"But you——" began Ellen.

"I! That is a different matter," said Charlotte. "If I love it shall be with the finest fibre of my soul."

"Let us walk down to the sea," said Ellen, somewhat puzzled.

The gorgeous holiday ended and Charlotte returned so penniless that she had to suspend her usual contribution to the Jews' Mission. She found plenty to do at home, for Tabby's health had broken down and, to the passionate regret of her 'childer,' she left them. They walked down the village to see her daily and fought against replacing her, preferring to cook their own meals and blacklead the stoves rather than admit a stranger into their midst, but when Emily let the potatoes burn dry, and Charlotte scorched the best pillowslips, Miss Branwell vanquished them, and young Martha Brown, the sexton's daughter, walked into the old kitchen to hold the fort until Tabitha's recovery.

Branwell was at home again, after a short experience as a tutor at Barrow-in-Furness, whence he had written to his friend Brown in a spirit of bravado describing past midnight orgies and present reformation. Now, at spasmodic intervals, he was working

desultorily in a studio at Bradford and learning that the George Hotel offered even more facilities for companionship than the Black Bull. When in Haworth he ranged the moors either alone or with Emily, complaining that the world would not listen to him and that all effort was useless while he was so buried.

Emily rarely asked questions, but now the pain in her brother's eyes hurt her.

"I write for the same reason that I eat and drink, to satisfy a craving of nature," said Branwell bitterly. "How can I get a hearing, Emily?"

"What did you say when you wrote to Wordsworth?"

"I told him of myself, and how, since I had spent my life among these secluded moors, I had learnt neither what I was, nor what I could do. . . . I begged him to tell me whether I should struggle on or lay aside my pen for ever. . . . He has left me to silence and despair!"

"What did you send him?" asked Emily.

"The prefatory scene of a long subject in which I strive to show a passionate, weak-principled youth, overburdened with imagination and feeling, who hardens as he ages, and brings himself to mental and bodily ruin."

"A sombre subject, Branwell." Emily shivered and looked at her brother with a sense of foreboding.

"The wind is icy," he said irritably. "Let us turn back. Charlotte was more fortunate than I, for Southey answered her."

"She calls his letter stringent and vows that she will write no more," commented Emily.

Branwell laughed. "A thousand Southeys will not stop Charlotte's scribblings."

"Nor yours, nor mine," said Emily; "the urge is in our blood. Did you know that Mama tried to write, as well as Papa?"

"No."

"She wrote an essay on 'The Advantages of Poverty,' arguing that poverty sanctified by religion was the state most free from discontent, and that the poor, being prevented from sharing in the luxuries of life, were less likely to be assailed by disorderly passions," said Emily.

Branwell made no comment and the two walked on in silence till they neared the parsonage and saw the stonemason preparing to leave the churchyard.

"He's been cutting a new name on some tomb," said Branwell; "the chip-chopping of his hammer is one of the first things I can remember and, I suppose, it will be the last sound I hear." Nodding a farewell to Emily he turned aside towards the Black Bull. "Brown is signalling, perhaps some gentleman from London is sitting solitary in the inn parlour waiting to make acquaintance with 't' vicar's Pat!' "

"Don't go, Branwell!"

"What? Not drink a jovial glass when another man will pay for it? He might even help me to fame and fortune, who knows?" cried Branwell, flinging aside her restraining hand, and Emily entered the parsonage alone.

Charlotte was absorbed in a newspaper, the only messenger that reached her from the wide outer world

for which she hungered, and Emily went up to the slip of a room that was her own.

If Branwell had complained of the bitter wind Emily had not felt it. To her, after her enforced exile at Roe Head and in Halifax, even the livid hillside above Haworth was Paradise, and now she re-read lines she had written in a different season:

> For the moors! For the moors where each high pass
> Rose sunny against a clear sky. . . .
>
> For the moors, where the linnet was thrilling
> Its song on the old granite stone;
> Where the lark, the wild lark was filling
> Every breast with delight like its own!

In an adjoining room Miss Branwell sat by herself, rocking gently, dosing a little and dreaming placidly of the old days and the pleasant social round when she and her sisters had been the belles of Penzance.

Down below Mr. Brontë harangued a group of curates. Now and then when the study door opened, his voice could be heard in the living-room where Charlotte was reading:

"When I observe your lack of concentration I no longer wonder that the Dissenter, bellowing like a bull in his village conventicle, should baptize sixteen converts in a day, while you read the holy offices of our service for the benefit of the clerk, the organist and the bea . . ."

The door closed and Charlotte heard no more till her father ushered his visitors out and delivered a last warning on the doorstep:

"I fear, gentlemen, that many of the parishioners are being allowed to go to Hell with their eyes unopened. Allow me to remind you of the method by which one of my predecessors rounded up delinquents. While the psalms were being sung he would leave the church and *flog* the loiterers out of the public-house and into the holy edifice of God! *He* was a man respected throughout the West Riding. I bid you good evening, gentlemen."

Mr. Brontë appeared at the dining-room door.

"Newsprint is not what it used to be," he said querulously. "You must come and read to me, Charlotte."

"Yes, Papa."

Chapter VI

THE JUDGMENT OF THE GIANTS

Anne returned from Blake Hall, spent a brief interlude in making new shirts for Branwell and then transferred herself to Thorp Green as governess to the children of a Mr. and Mrs. Robinson. Emily still stubbornly refused to make any more attempts in that direction but continued to carry the home burdens with Martha's help, awaiting Tabitha's full recovery, and Charlotte, in the intervals of applying for elusive situations, gathered her courage and submitted the preliminary chapters of a novel for Wordsworth's consideration. Southey had quenched her belief in herself as a poet; she prayed that his confrère would see talent in her prose; otherwise life's prospects were drear indeed!

About the same time Branwell, who had been attempting to translate the Odes of Horace, wrote to Coleridge asking whether he might hope to earn anything by such work: 'I feel the egotism of my language, sir, but I have none in my heart,' he added, somewhat doubtful of the tone of his own epistle.

History repeated itself. Branwell's cry was ignored and Charlotte received an answer. Wordsworth had been unable to determine whether his correspondent was an attorney's clerk, or a novel-reading dressmaker, but in neither case could he feel hopeful of the would-be author's literary future.

"Salutary," said Charlotte and laid her pen aside. Branwell, too, buried his ambitions and subsided into a clerkship at a wayside station on the Leeds and Manchester Railway.

Henry Nussey found himself a suitable if penniless wife and Charlotte tendered original congratulations. She trusted that the bride would prove a helpmeet in the difficulties of this world and an aid to her husband's permanent rest in the next.

When Henry went on his honeymoon Charlotte was allowed to stay with Ellen while she kept her brother's house at Hathersage[1] (Derbyshire) during his brief absence. It was a halcyon time and Charlotte was almost driven to wish that conscience had permitted her to accept Henry. As it was she returned home with valuable local colour and a useful name borrowed from a tombstone, 'Janet Eyre'—or had it been 'Jane'?—and was the 't' but a scratch from a chisel?

And now her attention was centred on her father's curate, a Mr. Weightman, who, greatly daring, sent all three sisters a valentine. For a space Charlotte saw him as a potential admirer of Ellen Nussey, but then he played chess happily with Mary Taylor, and now his eyes followed Anne—or was it Emily?—and there were whispers of letters from a girl in Durham.

"Fickle, very fickle!" said Charlotte austerely, and cautioned Ellen Nussey not to rest her hopes on him, but such anxieties were forgotten when a letter arrived from a Mrs. White of Upperwood House, Rawdon, offering a situation with a salary of £20 a year, washing deducted. It was accepted, and Charlotte left home

[1] Hathersage was the 'Morton' of "Jane Eyre."

with a firm determination to like her employer if such a thing were possible. She wrote to Ellen Nussey within twenty-four hours of arrival able to say that as yet she had found no cause for complaint.

Charlotte must have learnt something at Stone Gappe for she was not under notice when she returned home for the Christmas holidays to lay a daring project before the family. Could not the three sisters open a school of their own?

The magnitude of the idea startled everyone and only Charlotte's diplomacy and tact won her a hearing.

"You were ambitious too, Papa, when you left Ireland for Cambridge with a capital of seven pounds," she reminded her father, "and who can risé in the world without ambition? We have talents—all of us —we want to turn them to account. . . . Aunt Elizabeth, there is no one but you to whom we can apply for financial help."

"With your Papa's approval I will think matters over," said Miss Branwell, a trifle flustered, and returned to her own room.

"The project is peeping out of its shell!" cried Charlotte, walking restlessly round and round the table. "Will it emerge a fine, fully-fledged chicken, or addle and die before it cheeps! I believe we could do it if Aunt lent us a hundred and fifty pounds."

"It sounds an enormous sum," observed Anne.

"We should require every penny of that," said Charlotte.

"Where should the school be established?" asked Emily dubiously.

"Have you thought about terms?" asked Anne.

"Was fourteen or fifteen pounds per annum the fee at Cowan Bridge?" questioned Emily.

"We should have to charge twenty-five or thirty-five pounds," declared Charlotte, and the others gasped.

"It sounds very expensive," said Anne.

"Not for board and education which includes writing, arithmetic, history, grammar, geography and needlework," answered Charlotte firmly. "I should like to make it guineas, but Prudence forbids. I feel that frosty breath of hers already, it is as nippy as the north wind; however, we will charge extra for French, music and drawing, say a guinea each—and possibly five shillings for the use of the piano. You and I will teach, Anne, and Emily need only see to the housekeeping. Even if Aunt does lend us the whole hundred and fifty I think each young lady might bring some things with her for that would minimize our outlay."

"Sheets and pillowslips," suggested Anne sagely, "and four towels each."

"Yes, and a dessert-spoon and a teaspoon," added Charlotte.

"Washing should be extra," said Emily moodily.

Before Charlotte returned to Upperwood House Miss Branwell had undertaken to provide the necessary capital when a suitable location could be discovered, and her niece saw life *couleur-de-rose*, viewing optimistically even Branwell's transfer to Luddenden Foot where the staff consisted of himself and a solitary porter. Surely now, at last, this erratic, brilliant, but unsatisfactory brother, was making progress?

Then came what at first sight seemed a providential

offer from Miss Wooler who was retiring and saw a possible successor in her erstwhile pupil. Charlotte jumped at the chance only to renounce it later, for, on laying the matter before the Whites they gave her a new idea, which seed fell on ground already prepared by letters from Mary Taylor, who, with her younger sister Martha, was now abroad.

"Mr. White points out that we should find a good deal of competition," Charlotte explained to her aunt, "therefore we ought to be able to offer unique advantages if our school is to be successful." In fact, would Miss Branwell allow part of the promised loan to be expended in acquiring additional culture?

"In six months abroad," said Charlotte with fine faith in her own capacity, "I could learn French thoroughly, improve my Italian and get a dash of German; we could then take a better position in the world and our school would rank higher."

The elders withdrew for consideration and prayer, but Charlotte continued to pour out her plans.

Emily must go abroad with her; all the family should rise together, though for the moment Anne must remain at Thorp Green earning and saving; later she should have her turn—then the school and success! Charlotte would write to Mary Taylor at once, though, of course, Kockleberg might prove too expensive.

An hour or so later Miss Branwell opened the door and stood leaning on her stick.

"Emily Jane—Charlotte—I have made my decision. You may go."

Charlotte made a little run towards her: "Oh, Aunt! I thank you from the bottom of my heart," she cried.

"It is our chance—the turning-point in our lives—I feel it—*I know it!* Where will it lead? What is my destiny?"

"Don't be so excitable, Charlotte, and remember, it is *character* that makes destiny," said Miss Branwell sententiously as she beat a flurried retreat.

Chapter VII

THE PENSIONNAT HEGER

Charlotte and Emily sewed until their eyes ached. If they must go among foreigners, said Miss Branwell, they should appear well equipped with an ample supply of bedgowns and neatly hemmed handkerchiefs, even though Emily refused to follow the fashions and persisted in wearing clinging skirts on the ground that she preferred to look as God had made her.

"Remember, three threads to a stitch, Emily Jane," said Miss Branwell, giving up the battle.

Meanwhile letters passed between Charlotte and the Taylors, Miss Branwell made agitated inquiries concerning escorts, and Mr. Brontë invoked the aid of a neighbouring clergyman whose brother, quite providentially, was chaplain at the British Embassy in Brussels.

In due course circulars arrived from the Pensionnat Heger, Rue d'Isabelle, which was certified as being a thoroughly respectable establishment, and in the New Year Madame Heger agreed to accept the sisters although they were considerably older than her other pupils.

Charlotte and Emily packed while Mr. Brontë sat in his study copying out such useful French phrases as 'A traveller may and *must* always have a good bedroom to himself *alone*.'

One night as Charlotte was stitching pages together for her father she saw a figure lurch across the churchyard and sprang up, but Emily reached the door first. Branwell entered, but a Branwell that neither of his sisters knew. Haggard and white as the snow that covered him he stood swaying dizzily.

"You may as well know the truth—both of you—I'm dismissed."

Charlotte faced him, her small face set. "Dismissed!"

"And disgraced," said Branwell.

"You don't know what you are saying," cried Emily and her arm gave him the support he needed. "Where have you come from?"

"Over the moors," he answered thickly.

Tabitha opened the kitchen door, shut it in Martha Brown's face, pushed Emily aside and seized Branwell in her strong grasp. "T'bed, boy, t'bed."

"I'm tired, Tabby," said Branwell forlornly, "and cold!"

Helped by the old woman and followed by Emily he went upstairs. Half an hour later Emily returned, disregarded Charlotte's questions and went into her father's study to emerge with compressed lips.

"Emily, I must know," said Charlotte. "What has happened? What has Branwell done?"

"Nothing," answered Emily passionately. "He says that he is not guilty and I believe him. The auditors examined the books last week and found a discrepancy. Branwell had left the ticket-office when he should not and the porter—used his opportunities."

"Theft!" said Charlotte.

"Yes, theft—but *not* by Branwell," answered Emily.

"Thank God for that!" said Charlotte dully.

"Time for prayers, girls," said Miss Branwell, entering suddenly. "Who came awhile ago, and where is your Papa?"

Tabitha and Martha were summoned from the kitchen and Mr. Brontë appeared. Emily laid the Bible on the table.

"Papa, I *believe* what Branwell says——"

Mr. Brontë raised his hand for silence and leaning heavily over the book began to read:

"See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;

In that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways and keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply; and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.

But if thine heart turn away, so that thou will not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them;

I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish. . . ."

* * *

In February Mr. Brontë and his daughters started for Brussels. They spent one night in London *en route* and at daybreak Charlotte was peering through her window to see St. Paul's; never before had she so passionately desired money, or the opportunity money gives, for they could not afford to dally and London had to be left unexplored except for the briefest of walks.

The Pensionnat Heger was reached without mishap, farewells were said and the sisters saw the high gate, with its gleaming brass plate, close behind their father. Later they were to know the old garden in the full glory of its blossoming; now it was wintry and drear, even Methuselah, that wonderful old pear-tree at the end of the Allée Défendue, gave no hint of beauty and stretched bare branches towards a leaden sky.

Charlotte was twenty-six and Emily some two years her junior; it was difficult for them to accept the status of schoolgirls and their seniority made trouble in the school, the other pupils considering these foreigners as being too old to compete with them on equal terms. Nor did the sisters succeed in making friends. Debarred from easy companionship by shyness, insularity and religion, the pair held themselves aloof. At night their beds were at the end of the dormitory and a curtain gave them comparative privacy, by day they walked alone. Their happiest hours, apart from the holidays when they could explore Brussels, or visit Mary and Martha Taylor at Kockleberg, were those under Monsieur Heger, who vouchsafed them private lessons, although these, if thrillingly interesting, often ended in tears where Charlotte was concerned; weeping had a salutary effect upon the tender heart of this fiery, enthusiastic little man. He interested Charlotte immensely; never before had she met so intellectual a type, and when, instead of marking her compositions *peu correct,* and tearing them to threads, he condescended to argue with her, and even read a *devoir* aloud at a prize-giving it left her happy for hours.

"He is a little black being," she told Ellen Nussey,

"with a face that varies in expression; sometimes he borrows the lineaments of an insane tom-cat; sometimes those of a delirious hyena. Very occasionally he discards these perilous attractions and assumes an air not above a hundred degrees removed from mild and gentlemanlike!"

With Madame Heger, buxom, well dressed, busy with the domestic and financial side of the school and the upbringing of her children, Charlotte had less to do, although the spirit of *la Directrice* seemed to pervade the place. She was here, there, and everywhere, now in one classroom, now in another; no one was sure when the curtains over the glass partitions would be drawn aside for Madame to scrutinize a class in being.

The other teachers terrified Charlotte. She saw them dreading the approach of an age when they would no longer be required, and making ludicrous efforts to secure husbands at whatever cost to pride. Were they, what she was to become?

The agreed six months slipped by with astounding swiftness and Charlotte, still avid for learning, was unready to return. Emily, if less eager than her sister, acquiesced in Charlotte's determination to remain when Madame Heger offered to retain them *au pair*.

Martha and Mary Taylor found the two almost gay when they paid an unexpected visit.

A few days later Martha fell ill and when Charlotte went to inquire after her friend she found her dead. A second shock followed within the week in the form of a letter from home with a warning that Miss Branwell was dangerously ill.

The sisters travelled night and day, but the sight of Anne in her black frock told them that they had arrived too late; the funeral was over.

Emily looked at Miss Branwell's sampler on the wall and drew nearer to the fire.

Incredible to think that the little old lady would never come tip-tapping over the flagstones of the uncarpeted passage again to appear with her false front just a trifle awry.

"She was all the mother I have ever known," said Branwell. "I have lost the guide and director of the only happy days connected with my childhood."

Charlotte looked at him as he sat hunched forward in his chair with his head in his hands. After the phlegmatic Belgians he struck her as theatrical and insincere.

"Anne's loss—our loss—is as great as yours," she said sharply. "Don't take a yardstick to Sorrow, Branwell."

"I was alone by her bedside, I saw her last agony!" cried Branwell, "and——"

"Aunt left her Japan dressing-case to Branwell," interposed Anne's gentle voice, "and her workboxes to you and Emily, Charlotte. I am to have her watch, and the money is for the three of us. Papa says it will be about three hundred pounds each."

"Three hundred pounds!" exclaimed Emily.

"Three hundred pounds!" echoed Charlotte. . . . "It seems like manna dropped in the wilderness. But Branwell! Why, Branwell, Aunt loved you more than any of us, except Anne."

"Aunt made her will when we were children," said

Anne hastily. "She must have thought that Branwell would have been famous long before she died; Aunt did not know how dreadfully long it takes," she added, slipping her hand through her brother's arm.

The door opened suddenly and the three girls turned with a start. Tired and overwrought they half-expected Miss Branwell's wraith to appear. Instead came their father.

Was it imagination or did he stumble a little as he peered forward?

"Charlotte? Emily Jane?"

"Papa!" They ran to him. An hour later all knelt together in family prayer. Then once again came the old familiar phrase: "Don't sit up late, children," and they heard him wind the clock on the stairs. It was almost as if they had never been away, thought Charlotte, till there came a sudden vision of the classroom at the *pensionnat,* Monsieur Heger reading aloud, then pausing for a moment and looking across to the corner where she had sat.

Did he miss her?

Acc No 42023

Chapter VIII

'I KNOW THE PATH I OUGHT TO GO!'

It was blessed to be home again. With her dog beside her Emily stood alone on the moor above the parsonage in a white and sparkling world. How good was the Yorkshire air—how good to be free—she climbed high, but always higher were the encircling hills.

That morning Charlotte had translated and read aloud for her father's benefit a letter from Monsieur Heger and Mr. Brontë's pleasure in the tactful phrasing had been obvious. 'Their advancement more your work than mine. . . . You have taught them the value of time and instruction,' wrote Monsieur Heger, 'I have merely directed their efforts. Had your daughters been able to remain in Brussels another year Miss Charlotte would have acquired that assurance and aplomb which would be of inestimable value to her in the future, and it might have been possible to have offered a congenial post to at least one of the sisters.' The letter urged a return, and offered advantageous terms. Charlotte's little face had been inscrutable.

Down below a few early lights were being lit in the huddled houses that constituted the village and Emily saw a small figure emerge from the parsonage. Anne undoubtedly, and Anne must not be allowed to catch cold. Emily signalled her intention to return and Anne waited; climbing took too much breath.

Branwell appeared out of the shadows as the two reached the house and Charlotte came from the study as the trio entered. While pouring tea she launched the question Emily expected.

"We must decide when we are to return to Brussels. What do you think, Emily?"

"I am not returning," answered Emily briefly.

"*Not!*—but Emily——"

"I am *not* returning," repeated Emily.

"Then I shall go alone," said Charlotte.

"Must you go, Charlotte? Surely, now, you could find something suitable nearer home?" pleaded Anne.

"I *must* go back to Brussels," persisted Charlotte.

"And why?" asked Branwell.

"Someone in the family must rise," answered Charlotte, turning upon him fiercely.

"Then why not carry out our school scheme?" intervened Anne.

"Because it will have a much better chance of success if I go back to Brussels for another six months or a year," answered Charlotte. "Monsieur Heger urges my return."

"You will find yourself lonely there without Emily," objected Anne.

"I shall work all the harder," said Charlotte. "I must go back—I must! Monsieur and Madame Heger offer me sixteen pounds a year and I shall learn German."

"One of us is necessary here," began Emily.

"Branwell——" answered Charlotte.

"You need not trouble yourself to arrange my affairs for they are practically settled," interrupted Branwell.

"I think, indeed I am almost sure, that he will be able to join me at Thorp Green," explained Anne. "Mr. Robinson requires a tutor for his sons."

Branwell looked at Charlotte and laughed. "You thought me damned for ever on account of the Luddenden Foot Bridge catastrophe, didn't you?" he demanded. "Lord, how dull it was cooped up there with a fellow who could not even drink!"

"When one's only brother has been dismissed for culpable negligence regarding his duties there is reason for surprise that anyone else will engage him," answered Charlotte dryly as she left the room. Branwell lounged out but turned into his untidy studio.

"Do you notice any difference in Branwell, Emily?" asked Anne. "Sometimes I am afraid."

"And yet he is to go to Thorp Green!"

"It may save him."

"You must watch," said Emily fiercely. "Here, with all of us away, he has been lonely, ill, depressed and in disgrace. Is it surprising that he has—tried to forget?"

"At Thorp Green he will have work to do," said Anne.

"And there will be no Black Bull!" said Emily as she opened her desk to write the lines that had been running in her mind all day:

. . . . . .

I know the path I ought to go,
I follow fearlessly,
Inquiring not what deeper woe
Stern duty stores for me.

So foes pursue and cold allies
Mistrust me every one;
Let me be false in others' eyes
If faithful in my own!

Three weeks later Charlotte left Haworth. She started bravely, keyed to endurance by her desire to reach Brussels, but the train lost time, it was well after ten o'clock before it reached the terminus, and her courage evaporated. Feeling sure that no hotel would admit a traveller arriving at such an unorthodox hour she had herself driven to the docks, and rowed to the Ostend packet, where a young officer unwillingly admitted her to the ladies' cabin. Three days after leaving Haworth Charlotte saw once more the broad flight of steps behind the statue of General Balliard, which led to the Rue d'Isabelle, and the white walls of the Pensionnat Heger.

"*A la bonne heure, Mees Charlotte!*" cried little Louise, dancing behind her mother.

"*Tiens! Mais vous-êtes fatiguée!*" exclaimed Madame Heger, and Charlotte found herself hustled off to bed. She awoke and came down for the evening reading, but her head still ached and she made stumbling answers to Monsieur Heger's demand for an opinion on the scene he had chosen.

She cried herself to sleep remembering his contemptuous shrug at her floundering, doubly miserable because her return seemed to have been taken so much as a matter of course.

In the months that followed Charlotte found herself even more solitary than she had foreseen that she

would be without Emily. Although invited to use the Hegers' sitting-room she found it too much the centre of activity during the day, and in the evening domesticity, and her own shyness, kept her away. As a heretic she was excluded from friendship with the children, and she held herself apart from the other teachers although Monsieur Heger lectured her on her lack of sociability.

Sitting alone in the schoolroom, wrestling with a German translation, Charlotte felt that she had lost his good-will for all time, and that life without this consisted of interminable grey days stretching into years. Then suddenly he reappeared, all smiles:

"Mees Charlotte . . . a leetle gift for your fête day!"

"*Mon mari!*" called Madame Heger.

"I come, *chérie*, I come!"

But in Charlotte's hand lay a little German testament, and holding it closely she sat on, peopling the room with ghosts.

Other small gifts followed; a Pascal, some books of verse, then, treasure of treasures, Monsieur Heger's own discourses as delivered at the *Athénée Royale*. Charlotte received them with shining eyes and sat smiling and contented while the *maître* corrected her composition.

'Genius,' Charlotte had written, 'is of the nature of instinct. A man of genius produces at once, without labour, what a man without genius, never mind how learned or persevering, can never hope to do.'

"Excellent," said Monsieur Heger, his red pencil busy, and then came the clash of thought in which

Charlotte delighted. "A man does not make his own genius but receives it from Heaven, that is incontestable, *mais* Mademoiselle Charlotte, a machine does not create force, no, but it regulates the use of it and increases a hundred times the value of its effect. Figure to yourself then, two men, one with a lever, one without. Genius without study, without art, without the knowledge of what has been done, that is force without the lever!"

"Agreed, *mon maître*," cried Charlotte, "but the domain of genius is not limited to the intellect. It may be in the heart that this spiritual gift is established, and it is shown by quickened sensibility, by a vivacity of the passions."

He listened, argued, laughed, and Charlotte talked on, pouring out the pent-up thoughts of weeks. She was happy again, and happy too when she gave him his lesson in English and Monsieur Heger's stubborn tongue made havoc of his sentences.

Suddenly, for some unexplained reason the lessons ceased. Day after day Monsieur Heger dashed from class to class with lowering brow, while Charlotte, hurt and puzzled, struggled with German translations and delivered her English discourses to phlegmatic girls till she bear it no longer and flung herself in his way.

"*Monsieur—mon maître!*"

"Mees Charlotte?"

"Monsieur, I feel that I have lost your good-will —what have I done to forfeit the friendship you promised me? I have been indebted to you for all the pleasure and amusement I have had, and now you leave me to monotony. Monsieur, one wearies from day to

day of caring nothing, fearing nothing, liking nothing, hating nothing, being nothing, doing nothing!" Despite her good resolutions Charlotte spoke wildly and Monsieur Heger shrugged his shoulders.

"Mees Charlotte——"

But Madame Heger was upon them: "*S'il vous plaît, Mademoiselle, un moment.*"

"Papa!" a little figure ran forward and a minute later Charlotte found herself listening to Madame Heger's warning against an *attaque de nerfs.* She waved aside the offer of a sedative and walked away blindly. "I want to go home!" she said to herself as she hastened down the Allée Défendue assailed by a sudden vision of the parsonage kitchen on baking day. Tabitha would be blowing up the fire and Emily standing by the kitchen table cutting up the hash for dinner while Keeper pressed his tawny head against her and Tiger stretched out a tentative paw.

Constantin Heger emerged from the house and passed through the private door which gave access to the *Athénée Royale.*

"*Mon maître!*" said Charlotte, and old Methuselah sent down a shower of leaves.

The weary weeks dragged on, and now the school simmered with excitement. There were speech days and prize-givings and the vacation drew near. Everyone was joyous and everyone was hastening home; only Charlotte Brontë was to remain alone in Brussels for the full five weeks. England was far away and sixteen pounds per annum with deductions for German lessons and postage at one and sixpence a letter left no margin for unnecessary journeys.

Pupils and teachers departed. Madame Heger watched with speculative eyes this difficult daughter of a good English pastor for whom she and her husband had assumed responsibility, and then gathered husband and family into the *fiacre* that was to take them to the station.

Charlotte wandered through the silent schoolrooms. She tried to read but failed to concentrate; she tried to write to Ellen and found that she had nothing to say.

Each day seemed longer than the last.

She walked through Brussels, north, south, east and west. She wandered into picture galleries and looked at masterpieces with unseeing eyes.

One day she found herself weeping at Martha Taylor's grave. Walking back she reached Ste. Gudule as the bell was tolling for the evening *salut,* went in, and knelt among the penitents.

A woman rose and disappeared into the shadow of the confessional. Another followed her and Charlotte watched them as they left absolved and at peace.

She had spoken to no one for days, and now, moved by an ungovernable craving, she, too, approached the confessional and knelt.

Presently the priest opened the grating and Charlotte knew that he was listening.

Chapter IX

CONFESSION

"Charlotte is coming home," said Emily to Keeper, and the dog looked up with adoring eyes.

The sisters met at the bottom of the village street and walked to the parsonage saying little but each acutely aware of change in the other.

Was Charlotte's look of strain entirely due to the fatigue of travel?

Surely Emily was more than ordinarily silent?

Tabitha was at the door ready to pull off damp coats and provide hot drinks, but looking round the bare room Charlotte felt that she had lived a lifetime in a year.

A week later she asked the question that Emily was dreading:

"What is the matter with Papa?" Seeking Emily's face for comfort she found it stony. "On Sunday," Charlotte continued, "I saw people laugh and nudge one another in church when he stumbled into the pulpit, and to-day he called me to write a letter for him. It was a warning that he would take action for slander if any further insinuations were circulated."

"I have written several such letters," said Emily. "Papa's usual explanation is that his eye-lotion smells like a stimulant."

The sisters looked at one another in troubled silence, each refusing to make the too obvious deduction.

"Has he had his eyes examined?" asked Charlotte.

"Yes, they fear cataract."

"Oh, poor Papa!" cried Charlotte. Here, at least, she could pity and not condemn. "To fear blindness —to be blind!" She pressed her hands against her own aching eyeballs. "Oh, poor Papa!"

"Come, Keeper, a walk," said Emily, and the dog leapt up. Charlotte made no move and mistress and dog set off alone together. During the months of Charlotte's absence Emily had spent contented solitary hours roaming the moors or stretched full length on the heather, happy with her poetry, and now she felt no need for human companionship.

At Thorp Green Anne had embarked upon the third or fourth volume of some slow-moving romance known to her as "Solala Vernon's Life," but still kept up the writing of the Gondals with Emily; Branwell, too, had drafted a novel. Only Charlotte had found no outlet for the creative instinct within her; Southey had slain her belief in herself as a poet, and Wordsworth had damned her prose. She visited Mary Taylor, now on the eve of escape to New Zealand in search of the independence her brothers thought degrading, and saw Ellen Nussey, whose tentative love affair had come to naught.

Curates came and curates went, all uninteresting, narrow, unattractive members of the coarser sex, according to Charlotte's sweeping dictum.

Young Weightman, who had once sent the sisters valentines, had been succeeded by James William Smith, who in turn gave place to Arthur Bell Nicholls, seemingly 'a very respectable young man' and one

Charlotte hoped would 'give satisfaction.' Kindly Ellen found interesting germs of goodness in the new arrival, but Charlotte scorned the idea. All curates were vain and self-seeking, there was not one to mend another, and what struck *her* in Mr. Nicholls was his amazing narrowness of mind.

Ellen chided gently, but Charlotte's bitterness increased. Workless and hopeless, a vista of endless days stretched before her, till she cried out that she was no better than an aged person on the parish, and in the sleepless nights rehearsed imaginary conversations with the one man who had satisfied her restless intellect.

"*Mon maître—mon maître!*" she sat up in bed trembling and spoke aloud to the darkness. "Monsieur . . . I ask for so little . . . only the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table—I should not know what to do with a friendship entire and complete. . . . Write to me, *mon maître*. . . . Write to me, I beg you!" She waited tensely. "My spirit calls yours, Monsieur!" But only the voices of the night answered her; the surge of the wind, the hoot of an owl, and she lay waiting for the dawn.

When the grey light filtered into the room Charlotte rose, found the diploma which she had brought back from Brussels and sat looking at the bold signature, 'Constantin Heger,' and as she touched it hope was born anew and the old dream revived. If Southey and Wordsworth had killed something within her, Constantin Heger had given her a weapon with which to face the world. As he was teaching in Belgium, so she, his pupil, would teach in England, and still the dull aching in her heart.

She was ready with an answer when Emily pointed out the impossibility of leaving Haworth.

"Why should not the 'Misses Brontë's Establishment for the Board and Education of a Limited Number of Young Ladies' be established in the parsonage itself? Three pupils could sleep in your little room if we put in a wider bed."

"There is no fireplace—and the window does not open," observed Emily.

"It might be draughty if it did," answered Charlotte. Then she swept the prospectus aside. "I want work, Emily, sheer, hard, grinding work, or I think I shall go out of my mind. Mine bonny love, *help me!*"

For answer Emily blew out the lamp.

"I have learnt that the human heart can hold more tears than the sea holds water!" cried Charlotte wildly. "I know no peace, Emily. I am being punished for my selfish folly in returning to Brussels—but I did not understand—and it hurts to learn."

"Monsieur Heger, Charlotte?" Emily's voice was very grave.

"What fate? What influence lit the flame? I fight, I struggle—I try to keep occupied. I have wrestled with German in the driest, toughest books I could find; I have swept rooms and black-leaded grates—and the result is much as if I had gnawed a file to satisfy hunger. . . . I am starving, Emily."

With her infinite capacity for keeping still, Emily was lying on the hearth-rug, her inscrutable eyes staring into the fire. She said nothing.

"Don't tell me I lack pride," cried Charlotte. "It is humiliating not to be able to conquer one's thoughts

and to be enslaved to memories and regrets, but I have asked so little, Emily! Just acceptance of that I want to give. . . . I would rob no one . . . hurt no one . . ."

"That I believe," said Emily, ever sparing of words.

"Why cannot I feel for him just the degree of friendship he feels for me—neither more nor less? But my heart bursts. . . . Isn't it strange that a woman may love a man who is almost indifferent to her? He may give her a stone when she expects bread and she must learn not to shriek; he may place a scorpion in her hand instead of a gift, and she must learn to smile as it stings or the world will scorn her. Perhaps, by the time the squeezed scorpion dies, she will have learnt to endure—but Emily—it takes so long!"

Emily could find no answer to the wild words: "How often do you write?" she asked at a venture. "How often does Monsieur Heger reply?"

"I was to have one letter in six months—one little letter to nourish me for half a year—but I have not heard now for eight months. Oh, I know I was unreasonable and wrote out of my turn! One endures while strength lasts and then speaks without weighing words—*mon maître* answered—but by the hand of *madame!* Yet I cannot resign myself to the complete loss of this friendship. Without it I should be without hope—and I am afraid—afraid! . . . I did not believe that my letters were reaching him. I begged Mary's brother to deliver one, thinking that he would bring back an answer, but he has come empty-handed, and so has Mary."

"Do you remember how Monsieur Heger used to mark your *devoirs?*"

"I have forgotten nothing that concerns *mon maître.*"

"Un peu exagérée . . . trop d'exaltation . . . ponctuation n'est pas soignée," quoted Emily.

"Will he have written that on the margin of my letters?"

"Monsieur Heger can be stern, Charlotte."

Charlotte moved restlessly: "One day I was beside myself. It was the *vacance,* but Mademoiselle Blanche had returned to watch me. She was Madame Heger's spy—calumny of thought cuts deep, Emily! I was lonely, despairing, breaking for lack of a kindly word. I went to a priest . . . Papa must never know . . . I told him that I was a foreigner and a Protestant and he answered that I could not have the happiness of confession—'the happiness!'" she laughed drearily. "But I clung to the grating, I forced him to hear me, I confessed . . . and in the end he listened. I hope I shall never see that priest again!"

"Did he give you help?" asked Emily.

Charlotte scarcely heard her. "I could not make him understand that Monsieur Heger and I were born under the same star, and that the tangled threads of destiny are difficult to disentangle. He spoke of the malady of my soul, and said that I must leave Brussels. . . . I tried to disobey him, Emily . . . I waited, but the pain grew worse. No one understood; they suspected me; they did not trust me. And when the end came I never saw *mon maître.* I waited and waited in the *première* classroom, but there came only Madame in her list slippers. . . . Had he come he would have taken my hand—he might have touched my cheek with

his lips, I have seen him do that to another when saying farewell—as it is I have nothing to remember, no touch, no caress, however light. And now there is silence. . . . Am I mad, Emily?"

"A little, Charlotte," answered Emily steadily.

"Neither man nor woman need be ashamed of such love as this of mine," said Charlotte passionately. "It is real, it has widened my whole horizon. . . . I will make the world the richer for my knowledge and my pain. . . . Oh, go away—go away, Emily. I want to be alone!"

Emily obeyed.

Anne and Branwell arrived. He looked handsome and carefree, laughed perpetually, recited poetry, hinted at adventures and seemed once again the brilliant brother in whom all had believed. But Anne watched him uneasily as her father prayed.

* * *

"Good night, children."
"Good night, Papa."

Chapter X

REVOLT

In the succeeding weeks Anne did not relax her watchfulness, so when the blow fell she was not wholly unprepared.

"Where is Branwell?" Charlotte asked the question when his place was left vacant at the midday dinner. "Where can Branwell be?" she reiterated at tea-time.

No one knew, and it was not till after dark that the sisters' uncertain peace was disturbed by the chorus of a drinking-song.

"The Black Bull is closing," said Charlotte, peering out into the darkness.

"And Branwell is coming home!" whispered Anne, while Emily seized the little glass lamp and hurried to the door. "He is coming through the churchyard. . . . He is stumbling over the gravestones. . . ."

"Take the lamp," said Emily, re-entering and dragging Branwell after her.

Charlotte obeyed and Branwell lurched into a chair with his hat on the back of his head.

"Your coat is wet, let me pull it off," said Emily. He did not help her.

"I want my—my pellets," he demanded thickly. . . . "Prying fools I tell you . . . taken my pel-pellets."

Charlotte had faced round on to the room and stood

watching him but Anne, dropping on her knees, began to unlace her brother's boots.

"Not drunk," said Branwell truculently. "Can say—pellets . . . want-my-De-Quincey-I tell-you-pellets."

"Hurry, Anne," said Emily breathlessly.

"I can't," said Anne, "there's a knot." She scrambled up, fetched a knife and had succeeded in cutting the bootlace when Branwell clutched her wrist and twisted it backwards so that she was forced to loosen her grasp.

"Branwell, give that knife to me," cried Emily.

"Not I, the Devil is here . . . I'll kill him to-night." He struck right and left, but Emily clung to his arm with all her strength.

"Branwell, give me that knife," she reiterated. *"Give me that knife."*

He yielded suddenly with the whimpering cry of a child. Emily flung the knife into the fireplace and pulled him up: "Now, you must go to bed."

"No!" but he let her drag him towards the door where he clung to the framework with arm and leg.

"Anne—Charlotte—you must help," gasped Emily, but it was Anne alone who ran forward.

Still numb in brain and body Charlotte picked up her brother's soiled hat and coat and cast them on to a chair. "Branwell!" she said, looking at her fingers; she wiped them carefully and flung her handkerchief into the fire.

"Has this happened before?" she asked when the others returned.

"Yes."

"Often?"

"Twice while you were away," said Anne.

"Three times," corrected Emily.

"What is this talk of pellets—of De Quincey?"

"We think he has tried—opium," said Anne uncertainly.

They heard the study door open and their father's hesitating steps. He fumbled for the door-handle and peered in upon them:

"Good night, girls." He hesitated, his dimmed eyes straining towards the chair on which lay Branwell's garments: "Good night, my boy!" Then he drew himself erect in the doorway and held up his hand: "The peace of God be upon this household."

"The peace of God . . .!" echoed Charlotte as her father climbed the stairs. What had he overheard? How much did he know?

"Branwell is never going back to Thorp Green," said Anne, controlling her tears with difficulty. "Mr. Robinson has dismissed him—I had a letter to-day telling me —Branwell had one too—this bout is the result."

"Why has he been dismissed?" Emily and Charlotte asked the question simultaneously.

"I am afraid to guess," said Anne, "but it seems to me that this ends everything. There can be no school where Branwell is."

"Are the years of exacting study to be wasted?" cried Charlotte, snatching the prospectus from her little walnut-wood desk. Emily took it from her and tore it in half.

"Anne is right. There can be no school where Branwell is."

"But what are we to *do?*" cried Charlotte.

"Be patient," said Anne.

"Be patient!" raged Charlotte. "*I* will not feed my-

self upon maxims of resignation until I am no longer woman but merely an automaton of parchment and bone! A way out—oh, God!—a way out!"

"Thousands are condemned to a stiller lot than ours," said Anne.

"And thousands are in revolt," retorted Charlotte. "Emily, Anne, don't you realize that half a century of life may lie before us? How can we fill the empty years? There is pain at my heart—I want to *live*. My life shall not be a black trance like a toad's embedded in stone. I will not commit the sin of him who buried his talents in a napkin—the despicable sluggard!"

"Charlotte!" But Charlotte shook off Anne's caressing arms.

"We have gifts—talent—perhaps genius—and not in the dust of household drawers should the good gold be interred. I will not deposit it in a broken-spouted teapot, nor shut it up in a china closet. I will *not* smother it in hemming sheets, making shirts or knitting socks." Her voice grew shrill and she pushed the darning-basket off the table, scattering its contents as she walked. "I will not embroider samplers. I will not shroud my gifts in the linen cupboard—least of all will I bury them in a tureen of cold potatoes to be ranged with bread, butter, pastry and cold ham on the shelves of the larder! The way out!—Oh, God!—show me the way out!" She sobbed hysterically and fled.

"Better leave her alone," said Emily, stretching out a detaining hand to frightened Anne.

Chapter XI

THE LITERARY HIGHWAY

On the morrow Charlotte appeared white-faced, heavy-eyed and controlled, but Branwell's breakdown was complete. In the succeeding days his sisters listened to his ravings and asked themselves how much of the incoherent story was the result of overstrained imagination; by night his father, sleepless in an adjacent bed, bade him check his maudlin tears.

It was fact that Branwell had been dismissed in disgrace, but could Mr. Robinson have sworn to shoot his erstwhile tutor like a dog should he dare reappear at Thorp Green? Yet Branwell moaned that he was 'black with guilt' and for years had 'daily troubled pleasure, soon chastised by Fear.' The strange distorted sentences filled the sisters with vague alarm; each was distrustful of her own knowledge.

"How dare the man prate of a husband's rights?" shouted Branwell. "Is the love he bears her to be compared with mine? Love—passion—these are gifts like genius. . . . In eighty years he *could not love as much as I in a single day!* She knows it—she realizes it . . . *she calls me!*" They held him down by force.

Anne was exhausted, Charlotte disgusted and bitter, but Emily held her place beside the bed and still the cries continued:

"Without her my life is Hell! . . . *Hell!*" The hoarse voice broke and the disjointed sentences sounded less distinct.

Sleep came at last and Branwell recovered sufficiently to be sent away under Brown's charge, but he was still unbalanced when brought home:

"Misery walked by my side," he told his sisters gravely. "A woman robed in black who leant upon my arm as affectionately as if she were my legal wife."

Oversight was necessary, but too often Branwell evaded the watchers.

"What shall we be in five years' time?" asked Charlotte, dreading the future. "What can we *do?*"

"We have freedom and the moorlands," said Emily, "heather beneath our feet, the grey crags and trickling streams around us, the linnet flitting from bush to bush and the wild skylark high above."

But for Charlotte Nature did not suffice. The gift that was hers goaded her. Yet Anne was right; there could be no school under the roof where Branwell lived, nor peace, nor happiness, nor friendships for his sisters. Charlotte burnt the torn prospectus and forbade Ellen Nussey to approach the parsonage.

"God, show me the way of escape!" she prayed again, and one day found an answer to her cry.

Emily, the least uniformly neat of the three sisters, left a small notebook on the window-seat. Charlotte picked it up and forgot herself in reading her sister's poems:

> The mute bird sitting on a stone,
> The dank moss dripping from the wall,
> The thorn-trees gaunt, the walls o'ergrown
> I love them—how I love them all!
>
> . . . . . .

A little and a lone green lane,
That opened on a common wide;
A distant, dreamy, dim blue chain
Of mountains circling every side. . . .

How Emily's heart had ached in exile! Charlotte turned another page:

The dim moon struggling in the sky,
Heaven—a glorious Sun!
. . . . . .

Love is like the wild rose briar;
Friendship like the holly tree.
The holly is dark when the wild-rose blooms;
But which will bloom most constantly?
. . . . . .

The linnet in the rocky dells
The moor-lark in the air
The bee among the heather bells——

Emily entered and Charlotte sprang up, her little face transfigured. "The way out, Emily—the way of escape —freedom—fame!" she cried. "Your poems are good, I'm sure they are good; there is a wild sweet music in them." She turned the pages feverishly. "Listen:

"And if I pray, the only prayer
That moves my lips for me,
Is—leave the heart that now I bear
And give me Liberty!"

"How dared you? . . . *How dare you!*" said Emily, snatching her book.

"They are good," persisted Charlotte, ignoring her sister's anger, "and they ought to be published." She swept Emily with a torrent of words, but the girl stood

rigid holding her book clasped to her heart, numb with indignant anger.

"It's an outrage—an invasion of my privacy," she said at last.

"Forgive me, Emily," pleaded Charlotte.

Anne entered and looked from one to the other in consternation. What new trouble was this?

"I found a book of Emily's poems and read some of them," explained Charlotte.

"Is that all?" said Anne with relief. "I am glad you know what she can do." But a glance at Emily warned her that she was on dangerous ground. "Would you like to see some of mine?" she asked to change the subject.

"Yours! Why, Anne, I thought you had given up writing," said Charlotte. "Heavens, how we used to scribble in our childhood!"

"You most of all," said Anne, extracting some sheets from her desk. "Do you remember binding 'Visits in Verreopolis' in Epsom Salt wrappers because the paper was strong—and blue?" [1]

Charlotte scanned the pages Anne gave her:

My soul is awakened, my spirit is soaring
And carried aloft on the wings of the breeze:
For above and around me the wild wind is roaring
Arousing to rapture the earth and the seas.

The long withered grass in the sunshine is glancing,
The dead trees are tossing their branches on high,
The dead leaves beneath them are merrily dancing,
The white clouds are scudding across the blue sky . . .

[1] Six of these childish productions were sold by auction in 1933 and realized £1,750. Some of them measure 1⅞ x 1⅜ inches.

"Anne!" Charlotte turned a leaf and then another:

What shall I do if all my love,
My hopes, my fears, are cast away,
And if there be no God above
To hear and bless me when I pray?

. . . . . .

Blessed be Thou for all the joy
My soul has felt to-day.
Oh, let the memory stay with me,
And never pass away! . . .

"Anne, Emily—let's publish a book of poems, all three of us together?" But Emily shook her head and left the room, taking her book with her.

"Perhaps she'll give in later," comforted Anne. But Emily's forgiveness was not easily won. When she yielded it was to Charlotte's cry for help.

"Emily, give me something to live for—to work for—or I shall die! . . . No letters come . . . *mon maître* has forgotten his pupil. It hurts, Emily! It hurts!"

Permission once granted, Charlotte flung herself into arranging the poems, wrote to a publisher and argued as to print, paper and ways and means. If necessary each sister could pay something towards the cost from the precious legacies left by Miss Branwell.

Next came the question as to whether the book should appear under the writers' own names or *noms-de-plume*. The three were eager that their work should be judged on its merits, without a condescending touch because

they were women, yet innate truthfulness forbade the assumption of definitely masculine names and it was some time before they could satisfy themselves.

"Acton," decided Anne at last, making the selection from a convenient tombstone, "that betrays nothing."

" 'Ellis' may take the responsibility for all I produce," said Emily.

"And I must have a name beginning with 'C,' " said Charlotte. " 'Cumnor'? 'Cumner'?—No—*'Currer'*—that will do, 'Currer, Ellis and Acton'—but what shall the surname be?"

"Bell!" cried the three a moment later. A ringer had entered the church and St. Michael and All Angels spoke; they looked at one another, feeling that Fate had intervened.

" 'Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell,' so be it," said Charlotte, "and let them make a twofold attack upon the world."

"What? Prose as well as poetry?"

"Why not?" asked Charlotte, inhibitions forgotten.

Why not, indeed? Anne began to walk round the table in the old way.

"I will write the story of Agnes Grey. She shall marry and live happily ever after."

"One thing I vow," said Charlotte, falling into step. "My hero shall never have a shilling that he does not earn, Adam's son, he shall share Adam's doom. And you, Emily?"

"What about Branwell?"

"Too late!" said Charlotte bitterly. "Branwell's genius is dead."

"He must have his chance," persisted Emily.

"Sometimes there comes a gleam of his old self," said Anne wistfully, "to-day, for instance——"

"Then we must be doubly on guard," interrupted Charlotte.

"Bitter words!"

"I struggled to believe in him," cried Charlotte, "now —I despise him . . . and I fear him. There is not even safety for us while Branwell lives."

It was true as Emily's bandaged arm bore mute witness; two nights before he had set his bed on fire; her courage had saved him from a terrible death.

Chapter XII

PLOTS

'Reader [wrote Charlotte] perhaps you were never in Belgium? Haply you do not know the physiognomy of the country? You have not its lineaments defined upon your memory as I have them on mine. . . . Belgium! I repeat the word now as I sit alone at midnight. It stirs my world of the past like a summons to the resurrection.' . . .

She dropped her pencil and held her clasped hands against her meagre breasts. Thought carried her back to the Rue d'Isabelle; the green door swung open, the door barred to Charlotte Brontë but through which her creation William Crimsworth could pass at will, to work, as she had worked, in the *première* class-room. She could almost see the flitting pupils in their enveloping black overalls, and the vigorous figure of Monsieur Heger speeding forth to the *Athenée Royale*.

With an effort Charlotte groped for her dropped pencil and bent over the paper again; leaving Brussels had been like facing death!

Anne sat opposite her sister, with Flossie at her feet, busily pruning and recasting the interminable tale the writing of which had solaced her in her years of bondage; page was added to page and 'Agnes Grey' took shape.

Tabitha entered almost unnoticed.

"Burning good candles again, and they old enough to

know better," she snorted indignantly, but Charlotte ignored her and Anne only smiled. In Tabitha's youth the grass from the churchyard used to be exchanged annually for 15 lb. of candles (three to the pound), all of which were reserved for use at six o'clock prayers and the burial service; she had never learned to contemplate such things as fit for ordinary household use.

"Who's coming to turn the mangle?" she asked, hoping to extinguish one flickering flame, but Emily rose from the shadows to volunteer.

Half an hour later Branwell burst in to make noisy accusation that someone had been disturbing his papers. Called back from her dream world Charlotte looked at him wondering whether he was less offensive sober than drunk, and laid a detaining hand on Anne when Branwell left to continue his search among the litter in the long-deserted studio. Both were relieved when they heard Emily join him; Anne took up her pen again for 'Agnes Grey' must ask her mother's permission to take a walk; Charlotte moved once more under the lilac and laburnum in Monsieur Heger's garden.

Branwell found his lost manuscript and Emily listened silently as he cursed himself for his carelessness. Half a dozen men had met to read their poems around the fire at the Cross Roads Inn; Grundy had been there, and Leyland and William Deerden, and he, Branwell Brontë, the best poet among them, had been unable to compete—because some meddling sister had mixed his papers!

"And I wasn't drunk, I swear it, despite Charlotte and that speculative glance of hers which is enough to drive any man to the Devil. It's a mistake for a woman

to see too much, Emily," he went on, "thousands of you know it and keep your eyes dropped on principle, but not Charlotte—no, not Charlotte—*she* will not give me credit even when I'm trying to be good."

"Branwell, such bitterness hurts," said Emily in her slow speech.

"It's curious what a small dose of truth human beings can stand," he answered, then tossed aside a roughly tied bundle of papers. "I read those few chapters instead of the poem I had prepared," Branwell went on as his sister smoothed out the torn, dirty sheets. "They thought it good, but God knows whether I shall ever touch the thing again; it takes half a dozen glasses of whisky a day to give me even an appearance of resolution."

"What is this?" asked Emily, ignoring the last sentence which she knew was a covert appeal for money.

"A novel I began at Thorp Green. It tells the story of one man's infatuation for the wife of another, his schemes to gain possession of her and his revenge on those who thwart him. A story I, of all men, ought to be able to write, you think?"

"I did not say so, Branwell."

"It is the result of years of thought and a good deal of experience in the crooked ways of life," he answered, shamed by her tone.

"Go on with it. Finish it. Win fame and give us back our lost faith in you!" said Emily with a burst of passion.

"I can't," answered Branwell, dropping heavily into a chair. "The motive is gone."

"You *can!*" persisted Emily. "Listen, Branwell, I'll

help. I'll make a fair copy of this. *Work*—finish it—prove that you are what we strive to believe."

He picked up the torn manuscript, glanced at a page here and there, then flung it aside with a groan. "I cannot do it, Emily. You don't understand that I'm three-parts dead. Besides, that tale is strong meat, it gives a vivid picture of human feelings good and evil, the evil veiled by the cloak of deceit which ever envelops man and woman! I doubt whether I could find a publisher with sufficient hardihood to publish it." Then he tired of the subject and flicked the scattered sheets towards his sister. "Take it, read it, finish it or burn it as you will. After all I owe you something for saving me from the flames the other night. Strange to have been so near Hell never having known it!" He touched her bandaged wrist and Emily flinched in spite of herself.

"You are not drunk now."

"No, I'm sober enough to please the most exacting of Charlottes. I walked over the moors this afternoon and looked in at Top Withins, the most desolate farm in all Yorkshire, I think—they offered me tea and there I sat feeling like a martyr or a saint with a blue-eyed, dark-haired miss of eighteen in attendance. Little she thought the Devil himself was so near her! Do you wonder that I am suffering from reactions?"

"You are looking ill, Branwell."

"Ill! When youth, health and hope itself have been slaughtered within me!" he cried violently. "I wish my head was as cold as the medallion lying on Leyland's studio floor! Don't you understand? There is nothing left in the world for me now—except, perhaps, to discover how far the mind can carry the body without both

THOMAS FOGARTY

"Prove that you are what we strive to believe."

being cast into Hell. That old sampler isn't so far out, Emily—'Flee from sin as from a serpent for if thou comest too near it will bite thee. . . . The teeth thereof are the teeth of a lion to slay the souls of men.'" Thrusting the manuscript into her hand he turned to leave the room, ignoring her effort to detain him. "Oh, you needn't be afraid to-night," he told her. "I've had five-pennyworth of gin on the promise to pay out of a shilling I expect on Sunday; my credit is gone. I'm cold to the marrow of my bones and shall go to bed."

Anne looked up as Emily re-entered the dining-room. "Have you decided upon your plot yet?" she asked softly.

Emily slipped a torn manuscript into her desk and stood leaning against the table.

"Ellis Bell shall write the story of a man's infatuation for the wife of another—his schemes to gain possession of her—his revenge on those who thwart him."

"That is a plot that Branwell might have chosen," said Anne in surprise.

"Yes, a plot that Branwell might have chosen," answered Emily, and rarely had her hazel eyes looked more inscrutable. Presently Keeper lumbered in and girl and dog sat silent on the hearth-rug till Anne laid aside her writing when the trio withdrew together.

Charlotte wrote until eyes and fingers rebelled. The old pain was gnawing at her heart again and she found it solace, if a poor one, to slip through the Belgium class-rooms in the guise of William Crimsworth.

Pushing aside a completed chapter she sat on alone, holding at bay the thought that all hope of such letters

as she had longed for must be abandoned; the restless brain hammered out lines which were a prayer:

God help me in my grievous need;
God help me in my inward pain
Which cannot ask for pity's meed,
Which is not licensed to complain!
Unloved, I love! . . .

Yes, she would be ruthless with herself. She had offered the best that was in her; she had laid her intellect at the feet of a man who had not asked for anything that she could give . . .

Unloved, I love—unwept, I weep.
Grief I restrain; hope I repress.
. . . . . .

Vain is the anguish fixed and deep,
Vainer desires and dreams of bliss!

Rebellious now to blank inertion
My unused strength demands a task;
Travel and toil and full exertion
Are the only boons I ask!

To-morrow and to-morrow she would write again. She would draw Zoraïde Reuter with her flickering eyelids and wary eyes which knew so well how to make a swift, sly survey and then retreat beneath the vein of their light lashes. . . . Monsieur Pelet might marry Zoraïde, but William Crimsworth must find happiness with Frances Henri, the solitary, frail, fiery-spirited, Swiss-English girl. Yes, he should bring Love to the little lace-mender.

Chapter XIII

"WE ARE AUTHORS!"

As the weeks passed letters flew between the parsonage and Messrs. Aylott and Jones, the publishers who had undertaken to produce the Bells' poems on the authors' guarantee against loss. Meanwhile the prose tales drew to completion and the sisters began the final copying; all three found mental relief in the work, for life had never been more difficult. Branwell made night and day hideous and Mr. Brontë's sight deteriorated noticeably. He could and did still preach and the congregation sat very silent as he was led towards the pulpit and groped for the hand-rail. Even the recital of the commandments sounded more than ordinarily impressive as Mr. Brontë repeated them staring down upon his parishioners with eyes that could not see:

Emily's eyes rested on the old pew door opposite and she read the rudely lettered admonition:

Let all attend God's church
Where our best men have sung
for centuries, His praise.
Where er're the bells have rung
Upon each Sunday morn
Their sweet and welcome call . . .

Render your 'thank you' to the
Lord of all!

" 'Honour thy father and mother that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee,' " said Mr. Brontë, and Emily recalled her straying thoughts. Surely there was a bitter reproach in this commandment? 'Honour your parents or you shall die!' Suddenly she realized that she had written an essay on this theme for Monsieur Heger and she glanced uneasily at her sister. Since that one startling outburst Brussels had never been mentioned between them. Was Charlotte still watching for letters that never came? The little face beside her had changed in the past year, it had lost its roundness of contour, the mouth had taken a firmer line and the short-sighted, steady eyes seemed those of a hurt and puzzled child.

'. . . love one another,' said Mr. Brontë and, turning clumsily, found Arthur Bell Nicholls' hand outstretched to guide him. Charlotte noted the quick action; this curate was certainly an improvement on the last. How she had detested young James William Smith, partly, perhaps, because he had caused her acute disappointment.

For a space Charlotte had imagined that the young man was attracted by Ellen Nussey and had pictured her friend settled for life within reach of Haworth before a careless question betrayed that Mr. Smith's paramount desire was a well-dowered wife. She nicknamed him Lotharia Lovelace, prayed that Ellen's heart had taken no hurt, and looked darkly on poor Mr. Nicholls when he appeared on baking day accompanied by two others 'like himself.' Would he, too, soon show the cloven hoof? When, a few months later, Ellen reported a Keighley rumour of an attachment between her friend

and the tall Irish-Scot, Charlotte could assure her by return that never had rumour been more unfounded and that if such a tale went abroad it would make her the laughing-stock of the district. The curates looked upon her as a confirmed old-maid and all that existed beween herself and Mr. Nicholls was a 'cold, far-away sort of civility.'

Now, as Mr. Nicholls walked back to the parsonage to read to Mr. Brontë, she looked at the heavy-figured young clergyman and compared him with Monsieur Heger. It was humiliating to be the slave of a desire, and yet if only she could write to the *maître* again surely he would send her a word of sympathy; but, if he answered merely out of pity it would wound her deeply. She thought of the winter stretching before her father like a long night while he waited for the dreaded operation; of her own sight, dangerously weak; of Branwell —a drain on every resource, an impediment even to the mild happiness within her reach—lying day after day, now raving, now stupefied.

There had been an hour when the sisters had dared to hope. A letter had come and Branwell, flinging aside restraining hands, struggled into the village but only to return mad with passion. Mr. Robinson was dead, so much Anne knew from a hurried note written by one of her old pupils; now Branwell raved that, in his dying, this man had planned his wife's disinheritance should she see again the erstwhile tutor, and that she, overcome by remorse, was now scarcely sane.

"God bless her!—God bless her—But oh, that we had never met. . . . My heart will burst!" so he had moaned, turning his face to the wall. "God! I am too

strong to die, yet too wretched to live." He would not eat, he could not sleep; not all Charlotte's scorn, nor Anne's pity, nor Emily's sustaining strength, not even the groping hands of his blind father could still him.

So the weeks passed in dull monotony till one morning Charlotte, ravaged by toothache, entered the dining-room just as Martha appeared with a parcel.

"Emily! Anne!" she cried and forgot everything save that the packet was from Aylott and Jones.

Emily cut the string, Anne and Charlotte lifted out the books; here was their first literary child, fresh, clear and beautiful in its glory of print and binding.

"It's a real book," said Anne in a tone of surprise.

"A definite step towards Fame," said Charlotte with shining eyes. "We are authors!"

Emily was silent, but her slim hands held the book and she listened thoughtfully while Charlotte talked of the need of a bold policy in advertising. "We should spend *at least* two pounds," said the eldest sister; on that she was determined.

Despite this daring, three months elapsed before a first notice of the little volume appeared in a column advocating 'Poetry for the Million'; the laurels went to Ellis Bell who was described as 'a fine, quaint spirit likely to reach heights not here attempted.'

"Oh, Emily!" said Anne.

"We must do more advertising," said Charlotte firmly. "I shall tell Messrs. Aylott and Jones that they may spend *ten pounds*." Such prodigality left the others speechless. Another review followed, likewise a request for an autograph from 'an admirer.' The sisters wrote

their names, 'Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell' and forwarded them through the publishers when asking if three prose works would be considered, "The Master," [1] "Wuthering Heights" and "Agnes Grey," 'and perhaps,' wrote Charlotte happily, 'Messrs. Aylott and Jones will be good enough to inform Messrs. C., E. and A. Bell of the number of copies of the poems which have been sold to date.' [Should her share of the profits amount to so considerable a sum as £50, and conscience would permit it, she intended to steal away with Ellen to the sea!]

She dreamed till a letter came from Paternoster Row.

"Open it quickly, Charlotte," begged Anne, and Emily laid aside the likeness of Keeper upon which her careful pencil had been at work for days.

"They have sold—they have sold—just *two copies!*" said Charlotte, looking from the letter to her sisters and back at the letter unable to believe the evidence of her own eyes.

"Two?" said Emily, startled into speech.

"Two!" echoed Anne incredulously. "But, Charlotte, there must be a mistake."

Charlotte shook her head. "Two," she said again, "not two *hundred,* Anne, nor twenty, but just *two*—and Heaven alone knows what difficulties they surmounted in selling those two," she added, flinging down the letter.

"I suppose the Mr. Enoch who wrote for our autographs bought one," said Anne, "but who can have the other?"

[1] Known later as "The Professor."

"Attention, Keeper," said Emily, bending over her drawing-board again and Charlotte looked at her sister with a feeling of guilt. Was it for this poor return that she had forced her way into Emily's sanctuary and shown her sister's heart to the world? The blow was bitter.

Anne folded the letter neatly and went to help Tabitha who had hurt her knee; Emily put aside her drawing when unpleasant sounds from Branwell's room gave warning that he was awake. Left alone Charlotte fetched string and paper and the three manuscripts now ready for the publisher. Caressingly her fingers touched Anne's neatly written sheets and as she smoothed the worn wrapping-paper she prayed that her gentle sister's modest tale would be appreciated.

"'Wuthering Heights,' by Ellis Bell," she read the title aloud as she placed the next manuscript in the packet. Strange, violent book; it puzzled her that one so reserved and aloof as Emily should have shown such intimate knowledge of the moorland people. In Anne's work, as her own, there was autobiography, but not so in this by Ellis Bell. She looked at it uneasily, yet Heathcliff and Catherine lived, and more than once Emily's spirit spoke as through Catherine: 'What you touch at present you may have; but my soul will be on the hilltop before you lay hands on me again!' She laid the second book down with careful hands and picking up the third opened a page at random: William Crimsworth had just been told of the forthcoming marriage between Mademoiselle Reuter and Monsieur Pelet and was realizing that a modern French novel would soon be in progress if he remained in the establishment. . . .

From the room upstairs Branwell's querulous voice rose louder, but Charlotte read on:

Modern French novels are not to my taste, either practically or theoretically [so ran William Crimsworth's thoughts as she had divined them]. I had once had an opportunity of contemplating near at hand an example of the results produced by a course of interesting and domestic treachery. No golden halo of fiction was about this example; I saw it bare and real and it was very loathsome. I saw a mind degraded by the practice of mean subterfuge, by the habit of perfidious deception, and a body depraved by the infective influence of the vice-polluted soul. . . .

The outer door banged, then Emily re-entered the dining-room.

"What has happened?" asked Charlotte sharply.

"Papa believed Branwell's threat to kill himself and has given him money," answered Emily; both sisters realized that ugly hours lay before them.

Charlotte read the next few lines mechanically:

I suffered much from the enforced and prolonged view of this spectacle . . . unlawful pleasure . . . depraved for ever . . .

'No, she had not written too strongly,' thought Charlotte.

Thrusting all thought of Branwell aside, she tied up the parcel and had it ready when Anne entered to announce that the weekly carrier was waiting.

"Hope smiles on effort!" she said valiantly as the cart went unsteadily down the steep hill carrying three manuscripts in prose by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell.

Chapter XIV

"THE PROFESSOR" AND "JANE EYRE"

The packet which had been sent off to London by the Keighley carrier returned by the same medium somewhat the worse for wear; Mr. Aylott, who had a fancy for classical and theological works, found the Bells' prose productions quite unsuitable for his list. Emily and Anne might have been willing to forgo authorship after such an unpromising beginning, but not so Charlotte. Reversing the wrapping-paper she sent the battered parcel off once more, and then turned her attention to her father who was now almost blind but still fought against the necessary operation for the removal of cataract. Not till August could she persuade him to allow her to approach an oculist and he went to Manchester unwillingly, convinced that his daughter was taking him to his death and that he would never again return to the parsonage or feel Keeper's paws on his knee.

The lodging, which had to be of the cheapest, proved uncomfortable and the nurse alarming; Charlotte suffered qualms of anxiety concerning the catering; beef and mutton, tea and bread and butter would have sufficed for themselves, but nothing contented the superior young person who had been sent to them by the oculist. It was a relief to racked nerves when the day of the operation arrived.

At the last moment Mr. Brontë insisted that his daughter should be present and she sat through the ordeal, amazed alike at her father's firmness, now that the dreaded hour had arrived, and at his new dependence upon her.

Odd memories of childhood flitted across her mind as the surgeon's skilled hands worked. She remembered how this father, now lying so pitifully helpless, had once summoned all his children to his study, masked each in turn and demanded answers to his questions: 'What is the best mode of spending time?' 'How should a woman be educated?' 'What does a child like you require?' to which four-year-old Anne was supposed to have lisped 'Age and experience,' while Branwell—but her thoughts swerved suddenly. How were Emily and Anne managing their half-crazed brother?

Tension relaxed; she let herself look at her father's bandaged head and listen to the instructions which were being given to the nurse.

When the patient slept she sat beside him and read her letters; one from Anne told her that "The Master" had been rejected yet again. A tooth was aching violently, she had thought of consulting a dentist while in Manchester but Ellen Nussey had reported on the behaviour of a relative who had submitted to newfangled notions even to a mild anæsthetic but Charlotte could not tolerate the thought of outraging her own dignity; better to bear the throbbing of an exposed nerve than to appear like a fool! Now she scrutinized herself in the mirror with a sense of passionate dislike. 'Sunkened-eyed, grey-faced, withered,' she said, ruthlessly honest, 'and Ellen, if she could see me, would bid me

cultivate happiness, as if happiness were a potato to be planted in mould and tilled in manure! Rather is it a glory shining down from Heaven and I have missed its rays. . . . Youth is gone like a dream. . . . I shall be thirty-one next birthday and what have I done with the years?' She answered her own questions: 'Precious little!' Then courage rose again: 'But you are going to do something, "Currer Bell," ' she told her own reflection. ' "The Master" shall go forth again, and yet again, and you must write another book.'

Mr. Brontë still slept, and sharpening her pencil Charlotte began "The Autobiography of Jane Eyre." 'Jane' should be like herself, pale, insignificant in appearance, yet of indomitable spirit, and she should conquer Life.

Imagination worked and the pencil flew swiftly. Childhood memories revived. Charlotte drew Cowan Bridge and brought her dead sisters to life. Old wrongs and sufferings magnified themselves; Carus Wilson 'the black marble clergyman' whom she had hated with the blind unreasoning hatred of a child, should be set in the pillory, for all men to know. Oblivious to his philanthropy, seeing only his failures, Charlotte wrote on. Jane should suffer as one of the downtrodden class known as governess, but she should win love and happiness; she must meet her master, a man strong even to overbearing, yet one who could be gentle; and for just impediment?—Charlotte racked her brains—yes, into the story of 'Jane' could be woven that old, old, tale, heard long ago, of a maniac woman who had fired Norton Conyers.

Mr. Brontë groaned in his uneasy sleep, Charlotte

looked at him, then took another sheet of paper and wrote on till the nurse came to relieve her, and she went out to buy mutton chops.

By the end of the month it was clear that the operation was successful; Mr. Brontë would see again. A few weeks later strength and sight had improved to such an extent that the journey home could be undertaken, but Charlotte was glad to see Mr. Nicholls waiting on the platform; the father who had lived so strangely aloof from his children was showing himself heavily dependent upon her, and never before had she been more keenly conscious of her own physical frailty.

"God bless our grey house, even the walls thereof!" exclaimed Charlotte as she reached the parsonage, seeing it as a haven of peace after the Manchester lodgings. "Oh, mine bonny love, I'm glad to be home!" she cried to Emily as Anne's soft arms slipped round her and Tabitha hovered near to offer a brusque welcome.

Mr. Brontë went straight to bed and Mr. Nicholls, having twice observed that he must leave immediately to attend a meeting at the Mechanics' Institute, took a hesitating farewell after reiterating a hope that Charlotte had not caught cold on the journey and expressing a wish to be of service to her, or the whole family, then, or at any time.

"You are very good, Mr. Nicholls," answered Charlotte.

"Pray don't mention it, Miss Brontë," said Mr. Nicholls as he bowed himself out.

"You used to laugh at him with the other 'holies,'" observed Anne as the sisters drew together by the fire.

"I know," said Charlotte penitently, "but after all, his faults are such steady-going, clerical faults that they are almost virtues, and every now and then one comes upon a little nook of character in him that excites—" She hesitated for a suitable word and decided on 'esteem.' "Oh, it is good to be at home," she went on and walking about the room touched one article after another. "How have things gone? How have you managed?—Branwell?"

Emily did not answer and Charlotte looked at the younger sister.

"The position is unchanged," said Anne. "He has written to Thorp Green and his letters have come back unopened, so he cries that Mrs. Robinson is surrounded by people who hate him like Hell, but that she is, to him, like sunlight to a man who has lost his sight. He says . . ." Anne hesitated.

"Well?" asked Charlotte impatiently.

"He says that they have loved one another for four years."

But when Branwell slouched into the room Charlotte was startled to see how great a change had taken place in him; soon she was to learn that for days together he would lie like a log, refusing to leave his bed.

Ellen volunteered a visit, hinting at some momentous project, and came with a basketful of presents; an eye-screen for Mr. Brontë, apples and a new collar for Emily, a crab-cheese for Anne, a cap for Tabitha and a jar of preserves for Charlotte. Her plan was one to fire the imagination, and the sisters listened eagerly: Brookroyd was a large house, she, Ellen, had had the offer of two or three pupils; if Charlotte, with her su-

perior accomplishments, would come and assist, it should be a simple matter to build up a good connection from this excellent nucleus and ultimately, without overhead expenses, they might hope for twenty pounds a year profit—ten pounds each!

Temptation indeed, but restless and unhappy as she was, Charlotte stood firm; for the time being she was tied hand and foot.

"And before I am free," she told Ellen, "my faculties will have rusted and I shall have forgotten my accomplishments."

Watching the new dependence of Mr. Brontë upon his indomitable daughter, and listening to Branwell's strange confidences, Ellen could only feel abashed that she had advanced the plan; for it was too evident that her friend was bound.

"I am old at twenty-eight," Branwell told her, "and I pray every hour that I may die. Hope is dead, and I would rather want a shirt than a springing mind. Once I used to feel that if I could have the free range of the British Museum for a week I should have known Paradise, now, if you offered me the Elgin Marbles, my eyes would rest on them like the eyes of a dead cod fish, and York Minster itself would leave me cold—yet I live on, tortured and despairing." . . .

Such a burden could not be left to Emily and Anne.

Autumn flickered out with Ellen's visit; north-pole-like days kept Charlotte and Anne housebound and Emily venturing on to the moors reported a frozen earth and wind keen as a two-edged sword. Then when the gale dropped, came a sheriff's officer asking for

Branwell; the sisters paid their brother's debt. Hope was low these days, for the three manuscripts had been returned again and again, and the neatly written pages showed marks of careless fingers. Doggedly, Charlotte pasted the names of fresh publishers over the old ones and carried the packages into Keighley; it was a long four miles.

Once Mr. Nicholls overtook her as she turned homewards and dropped a hint that he might obtain preferment shortly but failed to secure even tentative congratulations, for Charlotte's first thought was for her father:

"Mr. Brontë cannot be left without a capable assistant," she assured him, "the whole duty would be too much, at his age." When Arthur Bell Nicholls left her, he carried with him a sense of guilt; but Charlotte forgot him as soon as he was out of sight. She was living in a world of her own creating.

St. John Rivers was trying to win Jane Eyre. Currer Bell planned Jane's refusal as she passed through the churchyard, and then her thoughts flitted to the book of poems that had now been published almost a year. Before the entire edition was distributed to serve as lining paper for trunks she would ensure that at least some of the celebrities of the day should have the opportunity of reading it, and the book should go forth with an uncompromisingly truthful introduction. St. John must wait for his answer—he was as cold-blooded as his prototype Henry Nussey.

Anne was reading to her father, Emily could be heard moving about in Branwell's room, and in solitude Charlotte set herself to draft a suitable letter. Years

before Wordsworth had give advice which had clipped the wings of a would-be poet; now he should see what Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell had done:

Sir,—

Heedless of repeated warnings my relatives, Ellis and Acton Bell, and myself, have committted the rash act of printing a volume of poems [she wrote]. The consequences predicted have overtaken us. Our book is found to be a drug; no man heeds it or needs it. In the space of a year our publisher disposed of two copies and therefore we have decided on distributing a few of the books we cannot sell—and beg to offer you one in acknowledgement of the pleasure and profit we have often and long derived from your work.

Yours respectfully,

CURRER BELL.

She had made four fair copies when Anne entered, intent on the re-making of a silk frock, and Charlotte read the epistle aloud. "I shall send the books to Mr. Wordsworth, Mr. Tennyson, Mr. Lockhart and Mr. Thomas De Quincey," said Charlotte firmly.

"But what will Emily say?" asked Anne in trepidation.

"I could quell even Emily just now, if need be," answered Charlotte, but there was no need to argue for "The Master" returned once more from his journeyings while "Wuthering Heights" and "Agnes Grey" found acceptance, Mr. T. C. Newby agreeing to publish the books, upon terms; neither Anne nor Emily could refuse any wish expressed by Charlotte at such a moment.

In wordless sympathy they watched her alter the title of the tale to "The Professor" re-wrap her battered manuscript, and address it to Messrs. Smith and Elder of Cornhill.

It returned yet again, but with it came a letter signed W. S. Williams which brought hope. "The Professor" was too short to be considered as a commercial proposition, but Messrs. Smith and Elder would be glad to read a three-volume novel by the same author.

* * *

"Jane Eyre" was finished. Once again the sisters walked to Keighley and they carried "Jane" in turn. She had to travel by rail and her fare could not be prepaid; Charlotte hoped that Cornhill would not refuse to admit the impecunious little governess.

Chapter XV

"CHARLOTTE HAS WRITTEN A BOOK!"

The days seemed long till an answer came, but at length Tabby appeared with a London letter in her hand.

"*Mr. Currer Bell,* care of Miss Brontë," she said, laying the epistle down before Charlotte with an air of disapproval.

Emily left the piano with its high back of worn silk, and Anne dropped her needlework, but not till Tabitha had left the room was the letter opened.

"Is it?—Can it be?" questioned Anne, almost incoherent in her eagerness. A wave of colour swept Charlotte's little face and her sisters guessed the truth. "'Jane' is accepted!" cried Anne, "I knew it! I knew it! Oh, Charlotte, I *am* glad!"

"So am I," said Emily, "if she *is* accepted?"

"She is! They like her—they want her," said Charlotte, and broke off to stare at the letter, there in black and white lay the splendid news. "Jane" with her combination of meekness and audacity had captivated Cornhill. Mr. Williams had taken her home and read her through the night; young George Smith had caught his senior's enthusiasm and was eager to publish the book forthwith.

Busy weeks followed. Newby, having accepted "Wuthering Heights" and "Agnes Grey" had dallied,

not so Smith and Elder, and soon Charlotte was correcting proofs; she carried them with her on a brief visit to Brookroyd but gave no confidence to Ellen even in the intimate hour of hair curling. Soon after her return home six presentation copies arrived and the sisters touched them with gentle fingers. In October[1] came a letter of good wishes and a note for one hundred pounds. "Jane Eyre" made her bow to the public and captured London as she had captured Cornhill; two months later Newby published "Wuthering Heights" and "Agnes Grey."

Letters and newspapers began to flow into the parsonage till a mystified postman waylaid Mr. Brontë to ask who Mr. Currer Bell might be, and was told that there was no such person in the parish. Charlotte wrote in haste to say that all the Bells' correspondence should be sent under cover to Miss Brontë; Cornhill hinted that it would like to know the secret, but Charlotte was sphinxlike in her reply: 'It suits us to remain anonymous.'

The *furore* "Jane" had occasioned continued: Thackeray read the novel and complained that it had lost him a whole day at the busiest period with the printers howling for 'copy.' "It's a fine book," he told Mr. Williams, "and some of the love passages made me cry, much to the astonishment of John who came in with the coals." The plot had struck him as hackneyed, but the style generous and upright, in fact "Jane Eyre" was the first English novel he had been able to read for many a day and he sent thanks to the authoress, guessing that it was a woman's book.

[1] 1847.

Charlotte was enchanted. "A good word from such a man as William Makepeace Thackeray is worth pages of praise from ordinary judges," she decided, her short-sighted eyes luminous with pleasure. "I approve Mr. Thackeray." But she was puzzled that her plot was considered anything but original.

And now the whole world was reading "Jane Eyre" according to J. G. Lockhart, who, half-way through, decided that it had strong interest though a disagreeable one, and was very cleverly written. Taking part in the question of the hour he argued that the book was written by a man, or, if not, 'by a very coarse woman.' George Eliot stood almost alone in her attitude of disapproval: "I should be glad to know what you admire in it?" she asked a friend. "All self-sacrifice is good, but one would like it to be in a nobler cause than that of a diabolical law which chains a man soul and body to a putrifying carcase. However, the book is interesting, but I wish the characters would talk a little less like heroes and heroines in police reports."

Then came a letter bearing the signature of G. H. Lewes promising reviews in "Fraser's Magazine" and the "Westminster"; Charlotte looked at it much puzzled. "He speaks of himself as 'a fellow novelist,' and his candid tone makes me think well of him, who can he be?"

"Ask Mr. Williams," said Anne sagely, "and Charlotte, don't you think you should tell Papa that you have written a book?"

"You must," said Emily. "Take him 'Jane' and some of the reviews."

"Let them be mildly laudatory then, such as will

give me a temperate idea of her success," said Charlotte.

Anne laughed and held up a journal. "This one says that 'Jane Eyre' is the best thing that has been written since Austen and Edgeworth were in their prime, 'worth twenty Trollopes and Martineaus rolled into one, with fifty Dickens and Bulwers to keep them company.'"

"Not for Papa's perusal!" cried Charlotte. "I'll take the 'Examiner' and the 'Athenaeum,' I respect that journal although I do not relish its remarks, but I suppose it would derange its dignity if it spoke too favourably of a new and obscure author."

"The 'Spectator' too," suggested Emily, "since it found 'more harm than good, in the book.'"

"If 'Jane Eyre' has solid worth she ought to be able to weather an unfavourable gust," said Charlotte, laying the paper on the top of her pile, "but for Smith, Elder's sake I hope that notice will not materially affect the sales. I wonder," she added meditatively, "whether the analysis of other fiction reads as absurdly as that of my 'Jane.' Listen to this:

"Two heroines, one a vast heiress, beautiful as are angels everywhere but in modern paintings. . . . She asks a handsome curate who will have none of her being resolved on a missionary's life in the far East; the other, a thin little, unpretty, slip of a governess who falls in love with a man twenty years her senior, sits on his knee, lights his cigar for him, asks him flat one fine evening, and, after a concealed mad wife is dead, at last fills that awful lady's place . . . A brazen minx!

"And that is my 'Jane'!"

"Never mind," said Anne consolingly as she came to look over Charlotte's shoulder at the concluding para-

graphs. "Even that reviewer admits that the book is all the rage."

But Charlotte refused to be excited: "One should rejoice with trembling over the dawn of popular goodwill and be prepared for change and disappointment," she said austerely. "Critics are capricious and the public fickle."

"I hear Papa," said Emily.

Charlotte reached the dining-room door before Mr. Brontë could shut himself into the study.

"Papa, I have written a book."

"At your age, Charlotte, you should know better than to waste your time."

"I thought—perhaps you might like to look at it?"

"Certainly not," answered Mr. Brontë promptly. "I do not strain my eyes by endeavouring to decipher manuscript."

"It's not in manuscript, Papa," intervened Anne. "It has been published."

"A fool and his money are soon parted," observed Mr. Brontë. "Is this how you waste your aunt's carefully husbanded resources, Charlotte?"

"I have not paid—in fact I have been paid," answered his daughter, holding out three slim volumes of "Jane Eyre" and the carefully selected reviews. Mr. Brontë accepted the pyramid and withdrew to his study.

"I believe the east wind is blowing," said Charlotte with a shiver, "I hate it."

"It's the least interesting wind there is," admitted Emily.

"And it will give poor Mr. Nicholls a rough crossing from Ireland," said Anne.

"Tabitha says some of the parishioners think it a pity he should trouble himself to return," observed Charlotte.

Emily went to the piano and began to play, Anne gathered her little spaniel on to her lap and Charlotte drew out a half-finished letter to Ellen Nussey. There was silence in the room until the three heard the study door open when Anne moved to fetch the Bible.

Mr. Brontë entered humming a verse from one of his own publications:

Is there a daughter kind and good,
Who ne'er a parent's wish withstood,
Whose sweetest task, whose daily food
'Tis to obey!

"Charlotte's written a book, girls," he said benignly, "and it's better than likely. You were always a talkative child, Charlotte, but I did not expect this result. Let us pray."

Tabitha entered in time to bend her stiff old knees as the sisters knelt.

Chapter XVI

THE DEDICATION

A new life had begun for Charlotte. Hitherto Ellen Nussey had been her sole regular correspondent, and Ellen, if beloved and loving, was not intellectual; now, "Jane Eyre" secured her something of the stimulating companionship for which she had hungered since she left Brussels. If not of the mental calibre of Monsieur Heger Mr. Williams was genuinely interested in this mysterious author who dwelt on a remote moor in the West Riding of Yorkshire, as was young George Smith; they brought her book to the attention of the literary giants of the day, wrote to her frequently, and saw to it that she was well supplied with the latest publications.

"Wuthering Heights" and "Agnes Grey" had followed "Jane Eyre," but neither swept London and reviews of these came slowly, the majority hinted that all the books were actually by one hand, that of 'Currer Bell.' Emily said little and slipped them into her desk.

Anne was already at work upon "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall" and day by day her pile of manuscript grew higher despite the expressed disapproval of her sisters. Charlotte told her that her talent was too weak for such a task as she had set herself, and Emily, reading a chapter that Anne had written with an aching

heart, cried out that she was brutal. But Anne, fresh from the strain of a night in Branwell's room, wrote on, though dripping tears blurred her words.

"It is a duty—to warn others. I must do it," she sobbed.

"Even though you pillory Branwell?" asked Emily sternly; never before had she failed to bend this little sister to her will, but now with the obstinacy of the weak, Anne persisted.

"Come for a walk," said Emily.

Anne shook her head and went on writing. Charlotte watched her with a sense of envy. Mr. Williams had hinted that a second book should follow "Jane Eyre" as speedily as possible and she had made five beginnings but only to fling them aside; the very fact that Mr. Smith wrote in expectation of another success alarmed her, and her alarm increased when she compared her own meagre opportunities with those afforded to such men as Thackeray and Dickens.

Mr. Lewes, whom Mr. Williams had assured her was a 'clever and sincere man,' had warned her to beware of melodrama and now she opened the battered manuscript of "The Professor" and compared it with "Jane Eyre." In the first, while following the footsteps of Nature and Truth as she saw them, she had deliberately restrained imagination, eschewed romance, and repressed excitement and produced a book which she felt was soft, grave and true, yet six publishers had returned it, assuring her that a book so deficient in incident would never suit the libraries.

"Jane Eyre" had been written, and "Jane" had leapt into fame at one bound. But Thackeray had declared

the plot was hackneyed and Mr. Lewes prated of melodrama. 'If either of them knew how much I write from intuition and how little from actual experience, they would think it presumptuous that I should have put pen to paper,' thought Charlotte, and opened "Jane Eyre." Ah, but there *was* truth in the book! She read of Lowood and felt herself battling with the keen wind on the long cold walk to church; she turned the pages and, in the austerity of St. John, saw Ellen's brother.

"Anne," she said suddenly, "there are moments when I can scarcely believe that anything I have written can have given even transitory pleasure to some of the greatest literary men of the day. It is a noble reward!"

Anne had dried her tears, but her eyes were still misty and she looked up with a vague smile.

"What shall I do with my idiot child?" asked Charlotte, holding out "The Professor." "No more shall my literary first-born be sent forth to encounter hostile publishers and tremble before them, fearing that his heart's pages may be used to light some casual reader's pipe."

"Lock him away," said Anne.

"What? In my desk?" cried Charlotte. "Oh, Anne, how could I daily face the monotony of his clerical countenance!"

"You owe him gratitude," said Anne, "at least he paved the way for 'Jane,' but perhaps it would be wiser to ram him down behind the books where our childish effusions used to lurk."

"Sound advice," answered Charlotte, adopting the idea and rearranging the books so as to conceal her manuscript, "and there William Crimsworth shall re-

main until such time as the world invites him out," she added.[1]

"The carrier, Miss Brontë," said Martha Brown, usurping Tabitha's office and carrying in a large brown-paper parcel.

"More books from Cornhill!" Charlotte's tiny fingers struggled with the knots. "How good are Mr. Smith and Mr. Williams in sending light into our torpid retirement."

Anne shared her sister's excitement and the two lifted out the books with reverent touch—new books, not well-thumbed copies from the Mechanics' Institute; their fastidious souls rejoiced.

"'A Jar of Honey,' by Leigh Hunt," said Anne.

"'Ranthorpe,' by G. H. Lewes," exclaimed Charlotte, "and oh, some of Miss Austen's works, now I may be able to discover why Mr. Lewes admires her." But when she had read "Pride and Prejudice," Charlotte was still bewildered: "It is an accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face, or a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden with neat borders and delicate flowers," she decided. "Miss Austen does not know the open country and the bonny beck, nor the fresh air and blue hills. *I* should not like to live with her elegant ladies and gentlemen in their elegant but confined houses."

Letters flew backwards and forwards, for Lewes insisted that Currer Bell must learn to acknowledge Miss Austen as one of the greatest of writers.

'Shrewd and observant, if you will,' retorted Char-

1 "The Professor" was not published until after Charlotte Brontë's death.

lotte. 'One of the greatest painters of human character, and one of the writers with the nicest sense of means to an end that ever lived!' insisted Lewes, though he was constrained to admit that his idol lacked eloquence, had no sentiment and was not a poet.

"Can there be a great artist without poetry?" asked Charlotte, now thoroughly aroused. "It is poetry, as I comprehend it, which elevates that masculine George Sands and makes something coarse into something god-like. . . . It is sentiment, sentiment jealousy hidden, but genuine, which extracts the venom from that formidable Thackeray and converts what might have been corrosive poison into purifying elixir!" In such discussions Charlotte was in her element; they helped her to endure the long hours by Branwell's bedside.

Another distraction was the preparation of "Jane Eyre" for a second edition. When the first hint of this had arrived from Cornhill, Charlotte had been scandalized at the rashness of the project, due, she felt sure, to the inexperience of a youthful publisher. Surely Mr. Smith would lose all he had made and "Jane" would be left standing in long rows on his shelves?

But Mr. Smith was not to be deterred, and while he set up seven pages of laudatory reviews, Charlotte wrote a 'Dedication':

> There is a man in our day whose words are not framed to tickle delicate ears; who, to my thinking, comes before the great ones of society—much as the son of Imlah comes before the throned Kings of Judah and Israel; and who speaks truth as deep, with a power as prophetlike and vital—a mien as dauntless and daring.
>
> Is the satirist of "Vanity Fair" admired in high places?

I cannot tell; but I think if some of those among whom he hurls the Greek fire of his sarcasm, and over whom he flashes the living brand of his denunciation were to take his warnings in time, they, or their seed, might yet escape a fatal Ramoth-Gilead.

Why have I alluded to this man? I have alluded to him, Reader, because I think I see in him an intellect profounder and more unique than his contemporaries have yet recognized; because I regard him as the first social regenerator of the day—as the very master of that working corps who would restore to rectitude the warped system of things; because I think no commentator in his writings has yet found the comparison that suits him; the terms which rightly characterize his talent. They say he is like Fielding; they talk of his wit, humour, comic powers. He resembles Fielding as an eagle does a vulture! Fielding could swoop on carrion, Thackeray never does. His wit is bright, his humour attractive, but both bear the same relation to his genius that lambent steel lightning playing under the edge of the summer cloud does to the electric death spark hidden in its womb.

Finally, I have alluded to Mr. Thackeray because to him, if ne will accept the tribute of a total stranger—I have dedicated this second edition of "Jane Eyre."

Literary London gasped. "Vanity Fair," which had so hung fire over the first few numbers that Thackeray had talked of withdrawing it, was flung into the limelight, since "Jane Eyre" was the most talked of novel of the day, and Thackeray vowed that the dedication was the greatest compliment he had received in his life. But when he wrote his thanks Charlotte was dismayed to find that, all unwittingly, she had laid rough hands on a wound. By an astounding coincidence, Mr. Thackeray, like Edward Rochester, was tied to a mentally deranged wife; Mayfair knew it, Charlotte did not.

This fact, and the dedication, set scandalmongers off on a new trail and soon half London was whispering that "Jane Eyre" had been written by a dismissed governess (presumably a discarded mistress) who, having been pilloried by Thackeray as 'Becky Sharp,' had now taken her revenge in depicting him as Mr. Rochester. While the hunt was up Ellen Nussey went to London and discovered that everyone was talking about a novel written by a mysterious individual called Currer Bell. Quite by chance (for Ellen was not literary), she heard a few chapters read aloud and when 'Jane Eyre' spoke, Ellen recognized Charlotte Brontë's thoughts. Could it be that those long white slips of printed paper, which had so engrossed her friend at Brookroyd, had been the proofs of this extraordinary book? Ellen could scarcely wait to go home before reproaching Charlotte for her secrecy—and then Charlotte refused to be communicative! Indeed, she counter-attacked and asked why her friend had listened to gossip.

"I have given no one the right to say I am 'publishing,'" persisted Charlotte. "If twenty books were ascribed to me I should scout the idea, and who ever urges it upon me after I have distinctly rejected the charge will do an unkind and ill-bred thing."

Ellen wilted under the onslaught and was driven to believe her own intuition had been at fault when Charlotte bade her tell inquirers that 'Miss Brontë repelled and disowned the accusation of having published a novel, and had no drivelling confessions to make even to her (Ellen), though if anyone had her confidence *she* most certainly possessed it.' The last

sentence, if involved, was balm to Ellen's wounded feeling and she prodded no more.

Mary Taylor was more fortunate than Ellen, in that a three-volume edition of "Jane Eyre" was posted out to New Zealand together with a ten-pound note (which Mary spent on a cow). New Zealanders so wept when they read the tale that its owner soon ceased to lend it. What surprised Mary was that Charlotte should have written a book out of which it was impossible to squeeze a moral.

Meanwhile "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall" appeared, "Jane" continued to sell as a book and found her way on to the stage of a minor theatre. "What humiliating spectacle will Mr. Rochester present? How pert and affected poor Jane when vulgarized by actors and actresses!" exclaimed Charlotte, but admitted that could she have gone to see the production quietly, and alone, it might have been worth enduring 'the rant, whine, strut and grimace' of her imagining for the sake of lessons to be learnt.

Another birthday passed and in her new interests Charlotte had forgotten the anniversary till a letter of good wishes from Miss Wooler and the gift of a home-made 'Housewife's Travelling Companion' sent her into retrospective mood. She was thirty-two, romance was gone from her life, but had she outlived all illusion? Her mood was bitter for a week before Branwell had escaped their vigilance and was ultimately brought back by the landlord of the Old Cock Inn at Halifax. There had been no hiding his shame, or theirs. Since then another sheriff's officer had arrived and while Branwell had wept, groaning that jail

would 'destroy him for ever,' the sisters had saved him by paying; it was fortunate that Smith and Elder had sent yet another hundred-pound bank-bill.

With tightened lips Charlotte took up a book recently received from Mr. Williams, but "The Life of Mirabeau" could not help her out of the Slough of Despond, for in it she found something of her brother's tragedy.

"A dangerous book," said Charlotte, staring across the tombs with unseeing eyes, "it leaves the impression that there is grandeur in crime committed on a colossal scale."

Chapter XVII

TO LONDON

The question whether the authorship of the most talked of novels for a decade was to be assigned to 'one gentleman or one lady, to three gentlemen or three ladies, or to a mixed male and female triad of authors,' was still agitating London when a letter from Cornhill cast a bombshell into the parsonage at Haworth.

The guileful Newby, publisher of "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall" as of the other books by Ellis and Acton Bell, had opened negotiations with America crying that his wares were by the popular Currer Bell, and Smith and Elder required that separate identity should be proved.

"Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell must go to London immediately," decided Charlotte, thankful that the days when permission had to be sought were past, and eager for instant action. "Come, Anne, you must claim your books, come, Emily, author of 'Wuthering Heights.'"

"Ellis Bell wrote 'Wuthering Heights,'" said Emily slowly. "Not Emily Brontë."

"It is as Ellis Bell, not Emily Brontë, that you must go to London," said Charlotte.

"I will *not* go to London," answered Emily, and neither argument nor entreaty moved her.

"Perhaps if two of us appear Mr. Smith will be satisfied," said Anne. "Let us pack our box quickly, Charlotte, then the carrier can take it to Keighley to-

day and we can walk down after tea in time to catch the night train."

"Come, Emily!" begged Charlotte.

"No!" said Emily, and left the room; the two who remained looked at one another in puzzled dismay.

They packed, Charlotte arguing that little would be needed as their stay would be brief, and Anne adding many cuffs and collars to the pile, on the ground that London had a sooty reputation, but the box was locked just as the carrier came struggling up the hill.

It was a strangely cold July and in the late afternoon a scurry of snow fell; so the pair set off on the four-mile walk, each carrying dry shoes and stockings. Too excited to sleep they sat bolt upright as the train jolted south.

New ground was broken for Anne after York, but this was Charlotte's third visit to London and the wheels beat out a rhythm: She was going back to Brussels . . . she was going to the Pensionnat Heger; there would be summer heat in the Rue d'Isabelle but shade under old Methuselah. . . .

London at last. Stirred by Anne's complete dependence Charlotte took the lead and presently the two reached the Chapter Coffee House in Ivy Lane, where Mr. Brontë had taken his daughters for a night on the first memorable journey to Belgium.

"We must wash," said Charlotte, "then breakfast —and *then* Cornhill."

Anne acquiesced.

Feeling unusually small and unimportant the sisters walked down the famous street and peeped shyly

through the door of a large bookseller's shop, which, to their eyes, seemed scarcely less busy than Cornhill itself.

They passed on, turned back, lost courage once more, then, nerving themselves for the ordeal, entered and asked for Mr. George Smith.

When the sisters were shown into the small room lit by a skylight which the young publisher used as an office, Anne took a seat near the door and left Charlotte to make the explanations which were obviously required. As a beginning she held out his own letter, but Mr. Smith was obtuse, and, seeing that the epistle was addressed to Mr. Currer Bell, asked how his visitors had become possessed of it.

"I am Currer Bell," said Charlotte, "and my sister here is Acton Bell; we are the Misses Brontë."

Mr. Smith looked from one little figure to the other and leapt from his desk to the door: "Williams —I say, Williams!"

Mr. Williams came, there were introductions, handshakings, congratulations, an anathematizing of Newby and all his ways, then a shower of invitations, all of which Charlotte endeavoured to evade. Much disappointed Mr. Smith insisted that he must at least bring his sisters to visit the Misses Brontë that evening.

Feeling an urgent need for sal volatile the two escaped and reached the backwater of their alley in the city with a sense of deep relief. They were still dazed when Mr. Smith appeared with the Misses Smith, both elegant in gala attire, for according to Mr. Smith's understanding, he, and they, were to escort the Misses Brontë to the opera. Anne accepted the situation with

equanimity, but Charlotte's head was still throbbing and she was very conscious of her country-made dress as she entered the crimson-carpeted vestibule.

"I am not accustomed to this sort of thing," she admitted with a wistful frankness that disarmed criticism.

It was 1 a.m. before kind Mr. Smith returned the two exhausted authors to their unfashionable Coffee House, and when they awoke next morning Mr. Williams was waiting below to escort them to church. Then came Mr. Smith once more, in a carriage and pair, complete with a mother to act as chaperone. The two were carried off to dine at Mr. Smith's fine house in Bayswater, but were too tired and shy to eat anything; mercifully there were no other visitors, but even so the meal was an ordeal.

Monday saw them at the Royal Academy, the National Gallery, and being introduced to Mr. Williams's family. On Tuesday, jaded in body, weary in mind and grey of face, they took the train for Yorkshire once more.

Charlotte was startled when she saw her own reflection in a looking-glass; if thin before, she was meagre now and her eyes were lost in dark caverns.

Despite fatigue the two walked the four miles from Keighley to Haworth lightly, carrying armloads of new books and thrilling with the sense of adventure; if the price to be paid was neuralgia or a sick headache, so be it.

"Branwell is worse," said Emily, meeting them at the Gate of the Dead which lead from the churchyard into their own little plot of green.

Chapter XVIII

DEATH COMES TO THE PARSONAGE

There could be no question about it. Branwell was infinitely worse than he had been when his sisters had left for London. Now Anne shrank from him in fear, and Charlotte looked at the broken man with loathing; he seemed no longer human. Emily alone tended him without disgust. No vigilance was proof against his cunning; even now he contrived to obtain an intermittent supply of drink or drugs from some unknown source and, week by week, his frame became more emaciated and his temper increasingly violent. At night his paroxysms of coughing racked others besides himself, yet on those rare days when sunlight bathed the moors and a west wind swept the ling, he would struggle up and out to lounge against a tombstone and watch Brown at work.

The Black Bull was still a magnet; sometimes an apologetic message from the landlord would draw Mr. Brontë from his study to fetch home his son who had been overtaken by collapse.

"I'm not drunk . . . I swear I'm not drunk!" the strident voice would cry, echoing up the narrow lane.

The end came unexpectedly two nights after Branwell had armed himself with a knife and crept into the village answering a summons which he believed to be from the Devil. For forty-eight hours he made

night hideous and Charlotte found herself praying for the end. How much longer could the worn frame endure?

* * *

Anne cowered near, her thin hands covering her ears so that she might not hear the curses uttered between the shuddering, animal-like cries that tore her heart.

"Silence, Branwell! Silence!" thundered his father, and momentarily the instinct of obedience asserted itself. Branwell dropped back on his pillows sobbing hysterically, as Emily relaxed her grasp. Mr. Brontë fell on his knees and began to pray.

"Amen!" said Branwell and then delirium seized him again. He cursed the father standing at the foot of his bed; he cursed the three frightened sisters who could find no way to help him. With a superhuman effort he sprang up, waving them all back:

"Keep off! . . . Keep off, I say!" Flinging out his wasted arms he faced Charlotte. "Give me some credit when I try to be a man. . . . In all my life I have done nothing either great or good—but I face death . . . I die standing!" An instant later he choked and crashed forward at their feet.

Tabitha, standing in the doorway, flung her apron over her head and gave a wailing cry, but Emily with her hand on her dead brother's heart was silent.

"Lord God Almighty. . . . Into Thy hands I commit the soul of my only son," said Mr. Brontë in quavering tones. He had aged in an hour and looked around him helplessly: "Charlotte?"

But Charlotte was a huddled weeping figure on the floor.

Emily alone, of the three sisters, followed her brother's coffin and stood in the raging wind listening to the burial service. Charlotte and Anne might find relief in tears, for herself she blessed the friendly dust that hid the dead they had hurried out of sight.

Still shivering she knelt by the fire trying to see him again in the glory of his childhood, but Branwell's last tragic cry still rang in her ears: "In all my life I have done nothing either great or good." . . . The bitterness of it—to die and leave nothing but the memory of sin, folly and suffering, when one had had the gift of genius!

"God sees not as men see," said Charlotte, as if answering her sister's thoughts. "If we can forget vice, and remember only the woe and tragic ruin of that which was Branwell, we need not fear the judgment of the Eternal Being."

"Had Branwell's sins been scarlet in their dye I believe that now they are white as snow," said Emily fiercely.

"He is asleep," said Anne.

In the heart of each sister was the knowledge that Death had come as an Angel of Mercy; there could be no regret for Branwell, but only for his wasted talents.

Calling Keeper, and taking her little notebook from her desk, Emily slipped away to the solitude of the chilly little room (once called 'the children's study') with its whitewashed walls and narrow window looking into the graveyard. She was tired and the stairs seemed

steep; pausing by the clock on the landing she was shaken by a violent fit of coughing. The passages were cold, her room colder, but she wanted solitude and freedom to write unchallenged the lines that were running in her head:

> How few of all the hearts that loved
> Are grieving for thee now! . . .

On Charlotte fell the burden of letters that had to be answered. It was well, for, sitting muffled against the invading east wind, she took up the book she had begun a few weeks before and found that imagination had fled. "Shirley"—or perhaps the tale should be called "Fieldhead"?—was at a standstill. Even the arrival of another hundred pounds gave her no more than a feeling of relief in its assurance that "Jane Eyre" was not lying a dead weight on the long shelves of the busy bookshop in Cornhill, whence now came letters of sympathy and boxes of books. Even Emily, growing whiter and thinner as the days passed, welcomed these with a silent smile.

Smith and Elder had taken over the poems originally published by Aylott and Jones. Emily refused to have these mentioned, but Charlotte re-read them in secret and with fresh amazement at the clear finish of those signed Ellis Bell.

"I should still love and admire them if every critic on the Press derided the work," she told Anne, flinging down a dubious review in an outburst of indignation. "Because Ellis's poems are short and abstract they are set aside as insignificant. How is it that people do not see that Ellis has the very finish Currer lacks?

Emily," she went on, changing the subject as her sister entered, "Mr. Williams urges that we should all visit London and see something of society, not just now, but when you are better."

"I am not ill," said Emily fiercely, "and what does Mr. Williams know of me?"

"Only that you are my sister," faltered Charlotte. "When Anne and I went to Cornhill we had to speak of you as the author of 'Wuthering Heights.' "

"Ellis Bell is the author of 'Wuthering Heights,' how dared you speak of a 'sister.' "

"The phrase 'we three sisters' slipped out inadvertently, Emily. I am sorry."

"Sorry! It was betrayal," cried Emily passionately. "But oh, what does it matter now? What does anything matter?" She left the room and Charlotte and Anne looked at one another in dismay.

"Emily will never let us speak of 'Wuthering Heights' as hers," said Anne, stifling an asthmatical cough as she bent over her sewing.

"Emily is an enigma," said Charlotte.

"I think that if 'Wuthering Heights' had had 'Jane's' success Emily would have told us more," began Anne, "I think that Branwell——"

"Nonsense," interrupted Charlotte sharply. "Branwell could never have written 'Wuthering Heights.'"

"He could not," admitted Anne, "but could Emily—*alone?* It is possible that *he* began it and that *she* finished it—hoping to win fame for him—and instead there was blame——"

"No, no, no," cried Charlotte, "it is a fantastic idea and I'll never believe it. Emily has genius."

"And so had Branwell—once," said Anne, setting her soft lips obstinately, nor would she speak again till Charlotte returned to the question of a London visit.

"We did see something of society in our governess-ing days," pointed out Anne.

"And the most miserable moments I can recall were those passed in drawing-rooms filled with strange faces," admitted Charlotte. "It's a formidable project, but I think it would be good for us."

"Not for me," said Anne quietly.

"One never gains any important good without proportionate suffering," argued Charlotte, picking up the "North American Review" as Emily re-entered. "This magazine deals with novels in battalions," she complained. " 'Jane Eyre,' 'Wuthering Heights,' 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' 'Harold: The Last of the Saxon Kings' and 'Vanity Fair,' all under one heading, together with an assortment of the lesser lights."

"Read it," said Anne, and Charlotte obeyed:

"Not many months ago the New England States were visited by a distressing mental epidemic passing under the name of 'Jane Eyre fever.' . . . Its effects varied with different constitutions, in some producing a soft ethical sentimentality, which relaxed all the fibres of conscience, and in others exciting a general fever of moral and religious indignation. . . . The book which caused the distemper would probably have been inoffensive, had not some sly manufacturer of mischief hinted that it was a book which no respectable man should bring into his family circle." ["My poor Jane!" interjected Charlotte, "where was I?—ump—'family circle.' "] . . . The hero, Mr. Rochester, became a great favourite in the boarding-schools and in

the worshipful society of governesses. That portion of Young America known as ladies' men began to swagger and swear in the presence of the gentler sex, and to allude darkly to events in their lives which excused impudence and profanity.

"While fathers and mothers were much distressed at this strange conduct of their innocents, . . . the publishers of 'Jane Eyre' announced 'Wuthering Heights'—by the same author"

Charlotte hesitated and stopped.

"Go on," said Emily.

"When it came it was purchased and read with universal eagerness——"

"Go on," said Emily again.

With a despairing glance at Anne, Charlotte continued:

"But, alas! it created disappointment almost as universal. It was a panacea for all the sufferers under the epidemic. Society returned to its old condition, parents were blessed in hearing once more their children talk common sense, and rakes and battered profligates . . . fell instantly to their proper level. Thus ended the last desperate attempt to corrupt the virtue of the sturdy descendants of the Puritans.

What a bad set these Bell brothers are!" said Charlotte nervously.

"Is that *all?*" asked Emily.

"No."

"Then go on."

"'Jane Eyre' purports to have been edited by Currer Bell, and the said Currer divides the authorship (if we are

not misinformed) with a brother and sister. The work bears the mark of more than one mind and one sex. . . . The family mind is strikingly peculiar, giving a strong impression of unity, but it is still male and female. From the masculine tone of 'Jane Eyre' it might pass altogether as the composition of a man were it not for some unconscious feminine peculiarities. . . . The leading characteristic of the novel, however, is the clear, distinct, decisive style, and this suggests a male mind. In the earlier chapters there is little to break the impression that we are reading the autobiography of a powerful and peculiar female intellect; but when Mr. Rochester appears, and the—the profanity, brutality and slang of the—the misanthropic profligate give their torpedo shocks to the nervous system—and especially when we are favoured with more than one scene given to the exhibition of mere animal appetite, and to courtship after the manner of kangaroos——"

Charlotte laid down the magazine in a passion of indignation. "I have never seen a kangaroo!" she exclaimed.

"Never mind, Charlotte, that reviewer is no gentleman," said Anne soothingly. "I suppose he did not like 'Jane' sitting on Mr. Rochester's knee—it was rather bold of her, you know."

"Go on," said Emily.

"There are also scenes of passion so hot, emphatic and condensed in expression, and so sternly masculine in feeling, that we are almost sure we observe the mind of the author of 'Wuthering Heights' at work in the text," read Charlotte. . . . "The whole firm of Bell and Co. seem to have a sense of the depravity of human nature peculiarly their own. . . . In 'Wuthering Heights' . . . the author has made a compendium of the most striking qualities of tiger, wolf, cur and wild-cat in the hope of framing out of such

elements a suitable brute-demon to serve as the hero of his novel. . . . Heathcliff . . . is a deformed monster . . . to whom Dante would hesitate in awarding the honour of a place among those whom he has consigned to the burning pitch. . . . For all practical purposes, however, the power evinced in 'Wuthering Heights' is thrown away. Nightmares and dreams, through which devils dance and wolves howl, make bad novels.

"And now for you, Anne, while you sit meekly sewing by the fire.

" 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall' is altogether a less unpleasant story than its immediate predecessor, though it resembles it in the excessive clumsiness with which the plot is arranged and the prominence given to the brutal element of human nature. The work seems a convincing proof that there is nothing kindly or genial in the author's powerful mind and that if he continues to write novels, he will introduce into the land of romance a larger number of hateful men and women than any other writer of the day. Gilbert, the hero, seems to be a favourite with the author, and to be intended as a specimen of manly character; but he would serve as a ruffian for any other novelist. Helen, the heroine, is doubtless a strong-minded woman and passes bravely through a great deal of suffering, but if there be any lovable or feminine virtues in her composition the author has managed to conceal them. . . . Everywhere is seen the tendency of the author to degrade passion into appetite; but while he succeeds in making profligacy disgusting, he fails in making virtue pleasing. . . ."

Charlotte looked up at a little gasp from Anne whose eyes were fixed on Emily, and her heart leaped. Was Emily, too, marked for death?

"We should send for a doctor," said Anne softly, but Emily caught the words.

"No poisoning doctor shall come near me," she vowed, and was assailed by a paroxysm of coughing. "And if you fetch one—I won't see him." Charlotte put a cushion behind her, but she thrust it away, complaining that it was torn and the feathers were coming out. Her thin fingers drew forth a handful and she scattered them one by one. "That's a turkey's, and that a feather from the breast of a wild duck—this from a pigeon. They should not put pigeons' feathers in a pillow, one could not die when lying upon it."

"*Die!*" said Charlotte, but Emily paid no attention.

"Here is a moor-cock's feather, Anne, and this is a lapwing's. I would know it among a thousand, the bonny bird. Tabitha must have picked these feathers up on the moor. The little hen was shot, don't you remember. I found its nest full of frail skeletons." She went on and on, speaking as Catherine had spoken in "Wuthering Heights," and then broke off suddenly. A moment later she was on her feet with a burning patch on her cheeks and all the old fierceness in her voice. "I'm not ill, Charlotte, I tell you . . . I won't be ill." She snatched the "North American Review" out of Charlotte's hand and hurled it across the room. "I'm glad that Branwell is dead," she cried wildly. "Glad—glad!" Exhausted by her own vehemence Emily broke off gasping for breath, but neither Anne nor Charlotte were allowed to offer help and a few minutes later the girl dragged herself out of the room to feed Keeper and a half-grown wild hawk she had found helpless on the frozen moor.

As December approached the anxious sisters watched

Emily weakening physically, although she still retained her passionate independence of spirit and stubbornly refused to see the doctor they urged upon her or permit herself to be nursed. Day after day she struggled up, and, racked by coughing, moved slowly about the household tasks she jealously claimed as her own.

Almost in despair Charlotte wrote to a doctor detailing her sister's symptoms and asking advice, but the reply was too technical to be of use, and she turned to Cornhill whence came a book on homeopathy. It was placed near Emily's chair, but she thrust it aside as she had done the medicines they offered, and Ellen's crab-cheese; nor would she look at the tiny spray of withered heather Charlotte had found after an hour's search. It had come from the beloved moors over which Emily knew she would never roam again.

"Mine bonny love, there is no sunshine in the world for me when you are ill!" said Charlotte.

One morning, though too weak to pick up a dropped comb which had fallen into the fireplace, Emily contrived to reach her wild hawk's cage and set the bird free. "If you send for a doctor now . . . I'll see him," she promised while struggling back to a chair.

The messenger travelled fast, but Death was swifter.

"Charlotte, if you fail me I shall die too," said Mr. Brontë, and Charlotte, who had weakened by Branwell's death-bed, now stood tearless.

"I'll not fail you, Papa," she vowed, as she walked with him into the grey church. Anne followed, and with her came Keeper to lie at their feet.

That night the old dog crept to Emily's door and

neither caress nor threat could check his long-drawn howls.

'What matter now the hard frost, and the keen wind that rages round the house?' thought Charlotte, taking the brindled head into her weary arms. 'Emily does not feel them!'

Anne, lying sleepless, found herself listening to the stillness of the snow-bound house wherein now sounded no racking cough but her own.

Chapter XIX

THE "QUARTERLY"

Branwell and Emily were dead, but life had to go on: Mr. Nicholls came to discuss with Mr. Brontë the terms of an eighteenth-century bequest under which ten poor children of Haworth received annual outfits of good blue cloth to be paid for by the rent of thirty acres of land at Withens. Venturing into the dining-room the curate asked Charlotte's opinion on the garments scheduled for the girls, 'one blue jacket, two petticoats of blue, and one pair of blue wool stockings.'

"*One* pair seems rather an inadequate allowance, Miss Brontë; I should be glad to know your views."

But Charlotte could take no interest in the problem, and Mr. Nicholls found himself summarily dismissed. "Shirley" was engrossing her thoughts; looking back over the pages she had written before Death invaded the parsonage Charlotte wondered if she could ever again become Currer Bell.

When once begun, the book had run easily, for she had enjoyed writing of the curates. 'Rods of Aaron' she had called them and even now the phrase gave her pleasure. Had she been unkind to Mr. Nicholls in her sketch of him as Marcarthey—but no, he showed up favourably compared with Donne and the Reverend Peter Augustus Malone. Mr. Helstone, too, promised to be true to life; Charlotte had seen his prototype when

a child; how stern was his air as he took part in the consecration service she had been privileged to witness! Mr. Hall? Her secret was safe with him, for he would no more suspect her of writing a novel than his dog.

Charlotte felt herself at a disadvantage in her delineation of male character; the men she had known, other than curates, could have been counted on the fingers of her hands.

With her account of rioting she was on safe ground. How many times had she listened to Miss Wooler's tales of the industrial revolution when manufacturers who introduced machinery into their mills did so at the peril of their lives? Turning a few more pages she found herself at 'Briarmains' with the Yorkes. Yes, Rose and Jessie were vivid; Rose spoke with all the vehemence of rebellious Mary Taylor (who it must be confessed had sometimes shocked Charlotte, for violence did not sound well under a bonnet), and Jessie sang Scottish ballads to her dour father as sweetly as had little Martha. The Moores, Robert, Louis and Hortense? She considered them carefully —and eighteen-year-old Caroline Helstone?

Her mouth was very pretty, she had a delicate skin and a fine flow of brown hair. . . . Her style of dress announced taste. . . . Her present winter garb was of merino, the same soft shade of brown as her hair; the little collar round her neck lay over a pink ribbon and was fastened by a pink knot. . . .

Ellen had worn that very dress last time they had met. And Shirley herself? Miss Keeldar of 'Fieldhead?' Charlotte put her head down on to the neat,

closely written sheets. Shirley who was to be what Emily would have been had Fate been kind! Here at least she could give Emily happiness; Shirley should not die rejecting sympathy and love, turning away from a ray of winter sunlight bitter because she would never again see midsummer or lie on the dry heather watching the passage of white clouds across the marvellous expanse of changing sky. 'Shirley, sister of the bright spotted fiery leopard, wild, tameless, slim and swift as a northern stream; Shirley should know life in all its glory; she should have love, happiness and wealth,' vowed Charlotte, looking up as Anne entered the room. The girl's fragility was emphasized by her black frock; was she too doomed?

But Anne, unlike Emily, let herself be loved; she accepted Charlotte's administrations and obediently opened the "Quarterly" when her sister put it into her hands commenting on the fact that it contained a review of "Jane Eyre," "Vanity Fair" and the "Report of the Governesses' Institute" in a combined article.

"Does it?" said Charlotte listlessly. "All 'Jane's' success seems poisoned for me now, though I still feel it an honour to be so often linked with Thackeray."

"They say 'Jane Eyre' is a 'very remarkable book,'" observed Anne, but Charlotte went on writing, and Anne's heart beat uncomfortably as she read.

When commissioning Miss Rigby to review the leading novels of the day, Lockhart of the "Quarterly" had mentioned the current Mayfair gossip as to the identity of Currer Bell and also his own impression that the Bells were a trinity of brothers of the weaver

class; then remembering the book of poems that had reached him from the same source a year or so before, together with an unusual introductory letter, he suggested that his contributor should include other works by these authors in her review. Each book shocked Miss Rigby more than the last. She found "Jane Eyre" merely another Pamela (and not even a Pamela refined to modern notions), and the story stamped with a coarseness of language and laxity of tone which had no excuse. The book, if remarkable, was in horrid taste, thought Miss Rigby, and bemoaned a period when sheer rudeness and vulgarity could be admired. 'Mr. Rochester is a brute with a disgraceful past and Jane herself the personification of an unregenerate and undisciplined spirit.' Constrained to admit that Jane does right and exerts great moral strength, Miss Rigby found this strength that of the heathen which is a law unto itself.

> No Christian grace is hers [she wrote]. Jane Eyre has inherited in fullest measure the worst sin of our fallen nature—pride. And, too, she is ungrateful; it has pleased God to make her an orphan, friendless and penniless—yet she thanks nobody, least of all Him, for the food and raiment, the friends, companions and instructors of her helpless youth. . . . The doctrine of humility is not more foreign to her mind than it is repudiated by her heart.

Anne glanced at Charlotte uneasily but read on:

> Altogether the autobiography of Jane Eyre is pre-eminently an anti-Christian composition. There is throughout it a murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor, which as far as the

individual is concerned, is a murmuring against God's appointment—there is a proud and perpetual assertion of the rights of man, for which we find no authority either in God's word or in God's providence—there is that pervading tone of ungodly discontent which is at once the most prominent and the most subtle evil which all civilized society has to contend with at the present day. We do not hesitate to say that the tone of mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code, human and divine, abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written "Jane Eyre"!

There were remarkable passages in the book, Miss Rigby was constrained to admit, but she found 'Jane' herself

> a vulgar-minded woman, one whom we should not care for as an acquaintance, whom we should not seek as a friend, whom we should not desire for a relation, and whom we should scrupulously avoid for a governess.

Hinting discreetly at the Thackeray scandal Miss Rigby summed up:

> Currer Bell . . . is a person who, with great mental powers combines a total ignorance of the habits of society, a great coarseness of taste, and a heathenish doctrine of religion. And these characteristics appear more or less in the writings of all three, Currer, Acton and Ellis. . . . At all events there can be no interest attached to the writer of "Wuthering Heights," a novel purporting to be written by Ellis Bell—unless it were for the sake of more individual reprobation. For though there is a decided family likeness between the two, yet the aspect of the Jane and Rochester animals in their native state, as Catherine and Heathcliff, is too odiously and abominably pagan to be palatable even to the most vitiated class of English readers.

Such a work as "Jane Eyre" is far from being beneficial to that class of ladies whose cause it affects to advocate, ended Miss Rigby, and turned her attention to the Report of the Governess' Benevolent Association and the ninety indigent ladies who after the edifying fulfilment of their natural duties were now candidates for four annuities of £15 each.

Miss Amelia D., aged 61, father a naval officer, died when she was an infant, and her mother when she was sixteen—compelled to become a governess. Unable to save on account of small salaries, ill health and the want of a home.

Miss Margaret G., aged seventy-one. Fifty years a governess, having been left an orphan at the age of three, feeble, with fast-failing health.

Anne shivered. She and Charlotte and Emily might well have been among the claimants of the future had it not been for their God-given gifts. She let the review slip from her tired fingers, but Charlotte picked it up.

"What's the matter, Anne? Is the Goliath of the Press training his big guns upon us?" She flicked over the pages, reading a paragraph here and there and grew scarlet with anger. "Papa must not see this, it would hurt him."

Anne offered a diffident caress, but Charlotte was not in a mood to receive consolation, although she protested that the review had not hurt her, and as for the slander: "It's a rootless plant, Anne, and must soon wither away; I care far more that you look so pitifully pale and weak."

"I'll be better when the warm weather comes," answered Anne. "Oh, Charlotte, I do want to go to the

sea! Can we? Mr. Newby has sent me £50 for the copyright of 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' let us spend it in going to Scarborough, you, and Ellen and I!" The glory of the idea gave Anne strength and she sat up with flushed cheeks and bright eyes.

Looking at her Charlotte dared to hope that there might be a year of life still before her sister—perhaps even two.

Could Papa be left? The question was in both their minds, but at seventy years of age Mr. Brontë seemed more stalwart than his daughters.

"Surely he would be safe with Tabitha and Martha?" said Anne. "Do write to Ellen, Charlotte, I should like her to come with us."

Ellen fell in with the plan, but Anne's doctor hesitated, urging the wisdom of waiting for warmer weather.

"Don't wait too long," advised Mr. Nicholls who visited the invalid daily.

"Winter drags like a funeral train," complained Charlotte. "Will Spring never come?"

Ellen arrived with gifts of cork soles and respirators. Mr. Smith wrote offering the services of a doctor esteemed in royal circles; Mr. Williams sent books and still more books; the sun shone fitfully and Anne was free from pain. Encouraged by her smile, Charlotte posted the first volume of "Shirley" to Cornhill with an assurance that she was ready to face the keenest criticism and that it would take a great deal to crush her since she knew her intentions were correct. "I have a horror of impiety and a reverence for religion," said Charlotte, mindful of Miss Rigby's strictures. If

her kindly publishers thought this second book inferior to the first she wished to know it, and would rather never see another of her works in print than fall below the standard that had been set.

The March winds blew, Anne's cough rent her body and Charlotte's heart sank. Cornhill wrote hesitatingly; neither Mr. Smith nor Mr. Williams liked the curates!

"But they are photographed from life," protested Charlotte, forgetful of her expressed desire for frank criticism. "I cannot give up Malone and Donne too suddenly, the pair are favourites of mine. . . . It is a pity you do not take pleasure in their modest twinkle." Cornhill, it seemed, lacked a sense of humour.

"Perhaps they think that chapter unfeminine," suggested Anne wisely.

April came, bringing an occasional warm day, and Anne's eagerness for the sea took on new life. The thought of a lilac-tree in bloom carried healing, and she longed to grow strong again:

"I want to do some good in the world before I leave it," she explained, "and I have so many schemes in my head for future practice, it seems unbearable that they should come to nothing and that I should have lived to so little purpose. If not now, can we go in May when the laburnums are in flower?" But still the doctor hesitated till Anne's restlessness made further delay impossible and lodgings were secured. Money was a secondary consideration now, for in addition to the modest income the sisters had inherited from Miss Branwell, and their combined literary earnings, Anne had received a legacy of £200 from her godmother.

Both felt that it could not be more wisely spent than in an effort to regain health. Charlotte secured a sitting-room and an airy double-bedded room with a sea view for thirty shillings a week; the bedroom was to be shared by the three. Ellen, who was to meet the travellers *en route,* was warned to be on her guard when she saw the change in Anne and Mr. Nicholls offered to escort the tragic little group, but the plan was vetoed by Mr. Brontë who considered his curate a presumptuous fellow; it would be well if his daughters saw less of him in the future.

To Charlotte the journey to York where they were to rest for the night seemed long, but Anne's pleasure in the Minster gave her fictitious strength; on the morrow when the trio reached Scarborough she vowed that she felt better than when she had left home. It was difficult to persuade her away from the chair by the window where she could watch sea and setting sun.

"Rest to-day, dear Anne," said Ellen in the morning.

"It will rest me to go on the sands in a donkey-carriage," answered Anne, but after an hour's slow drive she was willing to go in.

Death came in the afternoon. Slipping Charlotte's tiny hand into Ellen's firm clasp Anne went gladly.

For a week or so Charlotte wandered with Ellen over the white, solitary sands at Filey, then she gathered courage to go home. Ellen begged to be allowed to accompany her but with something of Emily's stoicism Charlotte refused: the desolation must be faced, and work, hard, unremitting, laborious work would be a more effective opiate than Ellen's sympathetic presence.

Mr. Brontë welcomed his daughter at the gate. His cravat was higher still and he had aged in her absence. Tabitha and Martha hovered in the background awaiting their turn, but the dogs rushed forward and having leapt on Charlotte barked in ecstatic excitement. Since one mistress had returned where were the others? Finding no one they followed Charlotte upstairs; Flossie's questioning eyes and Keeper's bewildered blunderings hurt her as much as the sight of her father's shaking, wrinkled hands.

"Poor Papa, with only the weakest, puniest, the least promising of all his six children left!" she said to her own reflection.

"Now, Miss Charlotte, come awa' t' tea," said Tabitha with the voice of authority.

But when tea was over and Mr. Brontë settled himself by his study fire as usual Charlotte went alone into the dining-room and shut the door. Every nerve was taut and the house seemed peopled with ghosts. The long-dead mother playing with her little son on the old sofa, Maria and Elizabeth who had tried to fill that mother's place. Aunt Branwell mincing down the passage in her pattens; Branwell, a boy once more, busy with his paints, Emily stretched on the rug withdrawn into herself, Anne on a little stool near her, her soft brown hair curling against her white neck. One by one they had left her; one by one she had seen them laid in dark narrow dwellings.

The dogs scratched at the door and Charlotte let them in. Flossie waved a quivering tail, then sat up and begged.

"It's no good, little dog. You'll never see her again!"

said Charlotte. She began to walk up and down the room and round and round the table as she had walked night after night with Emily and Anne; the restless dogs followed her. She heard the clock on the landing strike and strike again, yet still she walked. Fatigue, like Time, must surely dull the poignant heart-ache that was almost physical.

Once again the clock struck. The study door opened and Mr. Brontë looked in.

"Good night, child. Don't sit up late."

"No, Papa."

Beside the chair where Emily had died lay the half-cut volume of Emerson which the three had been reading in December; a ribbon of Anne's marked the page:

> There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that . . . though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said and done otherwise shall give him no peace. . . . Trust thyself . . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and as we pass through them they prove to be many coloured lenses which paint the world their own hue and each shows only what lies in its focus. . . .
>
> Temperament is the iron wire on which the beads are strung.

Charlotte put away the book with methodical hands, opened her desk and read the heading she had already

written for "Shirley's" next chapter—'The Valley of the Shadow of Death.'

Caroline Helstone should enter the Valley, but unlike Emily, unlike Anne, she should return.

Chapter XX

"SHIRLEY"

Work, as Charlotte realized, is the best antidote for sorrow, but except for a fortunate few, literary effort is not a mere question of desire; there were hours when she sat pencil in hand, unable to formulate a sentence; days when the creative gift seemed to have forsaken her entirely and she left her desk to roam the moors where every heather-covered knoll and fluttering bird spoke to her of Emily, and Anne seemed to lurk in the blue mists and pale shadows in which she had delighted.

Sometimes, too, domestic tragedies overwhelmed her. Stalwart Martha contracted pleurisy and Mr. Brontë persisted in prophesying her immediate death; old Tabitha, straining to lift a heavy kettle, fell with her head under the grate and it was all Charlotte's puny arms could do to drag the inert mass to safety. Shaken and unnerved she wept for ten minutes, then sent Brown hastening into Haworth to bring whatever village assistance was available.

So, goaded beyond endurance, Charlotte could only beg that her publishers would restrain their rash ideas and refrain from issuing a cheap edition of "Jane Eyre"; the public must be sick of the name of that one book yet she could make no promises as to when its successor would be ready; at the best of times Currer Bell could never march with the tread of a Scott, Thackeray or Dickens.

'It is evident,' said Charlotte in a letter to Mr. Smith, 'that one should never tell a gentleman that one has commenced a task until it is nearly achieved; they are always for walking so fast and taking such long strides.'

But the pile of manuscript grew, if slowly, and there came a day when she could write the last page.

'Shirley' was happy. She had become Mrs. Louis Gérard Moore and smiled when she talked.

'Her story is told,' wrote Charlotte. 'I think I now see the judicious reader putting on his spectacles to look for the moral. It would be an insult to his sagacity to offer directions, I only say "God speed him in his quest."'

And now came a note from Cornhill suggesting that as Mr. James Taylor was passing through Leeds he should extend his journey to Haworth and collect the precious sheets. Had she been introduced to this Mr. James Taylor during those memorable days in London with Anne? Charlotte could not remember, but the idea of entertaining a stranger at the parsonage on the lines of the entertainment that had been offered to her by Mr. Smith and Mr. Williams alarmed her; nor had she any desire to parade as an author. At Haworth she was Miss Brontë; Mr. Taylor would come expecting to be received by 'Currer Bell,' a very different character!

With some misgiving Charlotte decided that this stranger should be offered what homely hospitality was possible in one day, and that day, as she was thankful to reflect, needs must be short owing to the difficulties of travel. Could she have obtained Ellen Nussey's

presence Charlotte would have done so, but there was a wedding at Brookroyd and Ellen's services were bespoken.

Unintimidated by the tepidity with which his suggested visit had been received Mr. Taylor arrived, and to Charlotte's surprise her father emerged from seclusion to greet this denizen from a larger world in whose honour he had added yet another layer of silk to his cravat.

On seeing her guest Charlotte felt sure that she had *not* met him when in London; never could she have forgotten the dreadful nose that seemed so conspicuously central in Mr. Taylor's broad face. They talked over the reviews; a church magazine that had found fault with 'Jane' because she married Rochester before he showed signs of regeneration; a notice in the "Revue des Deux Mondes"—"One of the most acceptable," said Mr. Taylor.

"It appeared at a time when counteracting circumstances kept the balance of emotion even," answered Charlotte sedately. "Every cup given us to taste in this life is mixed."

Tentatively the visitor touched on the "Quarterly" and Charlotte fired up. Never would she forget one searing sentence:

'If we ascribe the book to a woman at all, we have no alternative but to ascribe it to one who has, for some sufficient reason, long forfeited the society of her own sex.'

"To such," said Charlotte, her frail little body taut with indignation, "the answer is that I come before the public as an author only, and that is the sole standard

by which they have a right to judge me, the sole ground on which I accept their judgment."

"Pay no attention to such criticisms, Miss Brontë," said Mr. Taylor wisely, "'Jane Eyre' still sells and even your detractors admit that it is a remarkable production."

"Yes, and compare it too favourably with the works of Ellis and Acton. It is intolerable to hear myself praised beyond them and cruel to hear qualities ascribed to them so entirely the reverse of their real characteristics—'Morose—brutal'——" Charlotte checked herself and began to discuss whether the new book should be launched as "Shirley" or "Fieldhead"—and then the preface in which she had satirized her reviewers, particularly Miss Rigby—what was the opinion on that? Unfortunately, as Mr. Taylor was constrained to admit, the preface had not found favour at Cornhill.

Charlotte was indignant. Currer Bell had been insulted. Currer Bell should reply; not a sentence should be changed! A sentence, no, not a line! The book itself was a different matter, here she felt her own judgment might be at fault and would accept that of the publishers. "The writing of it has helped me in my desolation," she added with a valiant attempt to keep her voice steady.

The vigorous, red-headed little visitor was touched. Charlotte Brontë in her mourning, and with the shadow of loss still upon her, was pathetic, and, although Mr. Brontë had appeared for a few minutes, Mr. Taylor was sufficiently imaginative to visualize something of the loneliness of life for a grieving woman in a parsonage almost surrounded by a dank graveyard. He

thought of her as he journeyed back to town and soon Charlotte found that she had a third correspondent in Cornhill, and yet another friend to send her books.

While she awaited Smith and Elder's judgment on "Shirley," steeling herself not to expect too much, she read the newly published "David Copperfield" and found it admirable in parts, though the Puritan streak in her took exception to certain chapters. In the same parcel came Froude's "Nemesis of Faith" (which she found morbid), Harriet Martineau's "Eastern Life" and Newman's work entitled "The Soul, Her Sorrows and Her Aspirations."

> . . . if thy Soul is to go on unto higher spiritual blessedness it must become a *Woman;* yes, however manly thou be among men. It must learn to love being dependent and must lean on God not solely from distress or alarm, but because it does not like independence and loneliness.

"Daring, pure, elevated!" cried Charlotte, deeply stirred. Mr. Taylor had made an excellent selection; her opinion of him rose. Why had she thought him second-rate?

And now came a letter from Mr. Smith. "Shirley" was all that had been hoped, there was no falling off from the "Jane Eyre" standard and printing had begun; once again packets of proof-sheets arrived at the parsonage. One of these was opened at Keighley, presumably by accident, but Charlotte was much chagrined.

If the secret of her authorship were discovered she feared for her tranquillity; as it was she had doubts as to whether she still walked invisible for "Jane Eyre" had swept Yorkshire, and once, with her own ears,

Charlotte had heard two grey-headed clergymen identify Cowan Bridge with Lowood; all the vindictive spirit in her leapt when the institution's founder was recognized; Maria and Elizabeth were revenged.

"Shirley" appeared, and although Charlotte refused to admit it anonymity was at an end.

One morning Martha came hastening back from the village open-mouthed with wonder: "They do say, ma'am, that you've written the grandest books that ever was!" she reported to Charlotte.

"Where did you get that tale, Martha?" asked Charlotte, much alarmed.

"Please, ma'am, my father heard it in Halifax and he do say that they're holding a meeting at the Mechanics' Institute to settle about ordering them."

Startling news if true, and true it proved to be. Not only that, but "Shirley" was soon in such active demand that members keeping the book beyond three days had to be heavily fined. Character after character identified themselves, even to the curates, each of whom found solace for his own wounds in crowing over the others.

Mr. Nicholls heard the report of Charlotte's authorship and appeared in search of verification; dismayed and still incredulous he hastened to purchase a copy of the book—and found himself portrayed as 'Mr. Marcarthey, decent, decorous and conscientious,' who laboured faithfully in the parish and caused the schools under his charge to flourish like the proverbial green bay-tree. . . .

Being human he had his faults; these, however, were proper steady-going clerical faults which many would call

virtues; the circumstance of finding himself invited to tea with a Dissenter would unhinge him for a week; the spectacle of a Quaker wearing his hat in church—the thought of an unbaptized fellow creature being interred with Christian rites—these things could make strange havoc in Mr. Marcarthey's physical and mental economy; otherwise he was sane and rational, diligent and charitable.

At least he had not been bracketed with the 'brazen beggar' Donne, or still worse with the braggart Malone. Bringing the book to the parsonage he read it aloud to Mr. Brontë; there was the unusual sound of laughter in the study.

"Men are made of the queerest dregs ever turned up by Chaos," said Charlotte, pouring out tea for the prototype of Mr. Donne.

The reviews surprised her almost as much as the reaction of the curates. Despite protestations to the contrary Charlotte had anticipated praise, and when the first chapters were described as disgustingly vulgar, and the Yorkes and Helstones as unreal, she was deeply hurt although she told herself that she was a fool to be disturbed and that praise from an ignorant and flippant reviewer would have been more mortifying than blame. If only Emily were there to scoff or Anne to offer a consoling caress! In her loneliness Charlotte turned to G. H. Lewes. What was his opinion? Let him be truthful however bitter Truth, remembering that that first chapter was true, 'as true as the Bible!' If only Lewes, and all other reviewers, believed Currer Bell a man she thought that they would be more just; as it was they persisted in measuring her by their standard of what was 'becoming' to a woman. Well, she had come from

obscurity and to obscurity she would return if "Shirley" failed. Condemnation scarcely mattered now when she stood alone; there was no one left to suffer with her.

Before Lewes could reply a shower of favourable notices had appeared and letters from various notabilities flowed in. Harriet Martineau praised the book, Mrs. Gaskell, in charmingly turned phrases, vowed that Currer Bell's works were being guarded as treasures for her daughters, and one wildly enthusiastic admirer scared Charlotte by avowing his determination to become personally acquainted with the gifted author of these remarkable books in whatever part of the United Kingdom she might hide herself. Pleasanter, by far, was young George Smith's report of "Shirley's" steady progress and his offering of Thackeray's portrait. The gift delighted Charlotte and she scrutinized the face inch by inch. What would this Titan think of her work? 'Critics do not seem to know what an intellectual boa-constrictor you are,' she told him, standing before his portrait. 'They call you humorous and brilliant; you are, but your humour is scalping and your brilliancy deadly. You coil around your prey and crush it—yet you are terribly in earnest in your war against folly and falsehood. What are your own faults?—Distrust of human nature? A galling suspicion of bad motives lurking behind actions? Are these your failings, Mr. William Makepeace Thackeray?' An overwhelming longing for intellectual society seized her. Surely now she had won for herself the entry into the circles of her desire? Should she go to London to mix on equal terms with these men and women of renown? . . . Had she courage to face the ordeal? Charlotte thought the mat-

ter over as she unpacked the presentation copies that had been lying for weeks in Bradford owing to the carelessness of the local carrier.

Ellen was the first recipient. She was delighted with the gift and almost more so at the lifting of the embargo of silence. On her coming she overflowed with admiration, asked to see the reviews and laughed to think that Canon Heald had identified himself with 'the Reverend Cyril Hall.' He had asked her for a 'key' vowing that if Charlotte used him as 'copy' he was entitled to know what company he kept.

"None of the characters in 'Shirley' are actual portraits," explained Charlotte gravely. "It would not suit the rules of art, or my own feelings, to write in that style. Heroes and heroines are abstractions," but her remarks passed lightly over Ellen who was glancing through the reviews.

"They are none of them good enough," she declared that night in the intimacy of hair-curling.

Charlotte herself might have been of the same opinion, but *Ellen* must not be permitted to rub the gilt off the gingerbread.

"Nothing higher has been said of any living author," she told her friend frigidly, and when Ellen attempted to hold her ground Charlotte's wrath swept her: "Wealthy writers who give grand dinners, and authors of rank who have toadies in their train, *do* command a fulsome strain of flatterers," she conceded. "But all that has been said of *my* work is entirely disinterested, and please remember, Ellen, that a mite of praise bestowed upon an unknown and obscure author is worth more than purchased raptures."

"Yes," said Ellen meekly, and Charlotte tried to smile as she reminded herself that, though Ellen was her dearest friend, she had never held a high opinion of her intellect. Where Ellen excelled was in her gift for loving—and, too, she had a talent for clothes.

Lying in bed Charlotte hinted at the project of a London visit and Ellen's imagination took fire. Charlotte *must* accept her advice in regard to shopping and the village dressmaker should be engaged forthwith, even though Charlotte did hate her manners—or lack of them— and complained that the seamstress's society gave her headaches and indigestion. The rôles were reversed; aware of her own lack of social knowledge as compared with Ellen who had been twice to London (although she had *not* entered literary circles), Charlotte listened.

Before Ellen's visit ended the two had listed, and provisionally priced, all Charlotte's requirements, and Ellen undertook to lay out five pounds ten shillings in the purchase of a fur boa and cuffs.

"If there is any money over *please* buy something for yourself," urged Charlotte generously.

Chapter XXI

'THE GREAT BABYLON'

In November, when writing to Mr. Williams, Charlotte mentioned that she was contemplating a visit to 'the great Babylon' with the result that an invitation arrived by return from Mrs. Smith. Currer Bell should be met and welcomed whenever she could come, and would find half London eager to do her honour. It was kind and flattering, but Charlotte scarcely felt equal to supporting Currer Bell's fame. When accepting, she stipulated that she was not to be lionized as she wished to remain unknown. Perhaps she could pass as 'a Miss Brown from the country.' Mrs. Smith, who as the mother of an enterprising bachelor publisher, was accustomed to entertaining authors, shook her head in perplexity as she read the letter. Was Miss Brontë an eccentric, she asked her son? She herself had hardly differentiated Charlotte from Anne at the brief meeting over a year before. Mr. George Smith remembered her as quaint and old-fashioned with an over-large mouth and bad complexion—but "Jane Eyre" had been the book of the year and he hoped that "Shirley" also would create a stir.

"George, how can we take her about!" that young man's sisters protested with an over-vivid memory of

the night when they, in a flutter of excitement over chaperoning the mysterious Currer Bell to the opera, had found two dowdy little country-women in thick shoes and stockings and high-necked, home-made frocks awaiting them in a city coffee-house where no ladies should have stayed.

December was in sight before Charlotte succeeded in nerving herself for the ordeal of the visit. The village dressmaker had completed her task, but Ellen Nussey had not had an opportunity of passing judgment on the result. She had sent the furs, a sable set and also a squirrel to save the sable. Charlotte tried them on doubtfully and wished for the hundredth time that Keighley had a dentist with sufficient skill to deal with her teeth. Yet, small and plain as she was, the world wished to know her; it was a consolatory thought.

She remembered a hot discussion with Emily and Anne over 'Jane's' personal appearance. They had insisted that heroines must be beautiful and could not be made interesting on any other terms; she had argued that such an attitude was morally wrong and considered that in 'Jane's' success she had proved her point; now she was to prove it again in her own person—but she did wish that she could have had Ellen's opinion on her new mantle!

Martha lumbered up the uncarpeted stairs to say that Mr. Nicholls desired to see her, and Charlotte descended to find her visitor gravely contemplating the portrait of Thackeray.

"An interesting face and an interesting man, no doubt," Mr. Nicholls observed, carefully waiting till

Charlotte had seated herself before taking a chair.

"Mr. Thackeray is unique," answered Charlotte. "He is better known now than he was two years ago and I do not doubt that if he lives to do himself justice he will be better known a hundred years hence than he is to-day despite the progress he has made in the last twelve months. Tea, Mr. Nicholls?"

"I thank you." He accepted the cup she offered but was not to be diverted from his subject. "Unique, perhaps, still he owes you a debt of gratitude, Miss Brontë. Surely I am correct in saying that until you called attention to his work by the Dedication in the second edition of 'Jane Eyre' he was known more as a writer of pot-boilers than anything else? Indeed, I had heard it said that he would write for anything, about anything, and had so lost himself that his status in London was not good."

"You are visiting Miss Brontë, *not* Currer Bell, Mr. Nicholls," said Charlotte severely. "Two lumps of sugar, or one?" Decent, decorous and conscientious though Arthur Bell Nicholls might be, what did *he* know of the giants of literature? Charlotte turned the conversation to Sunday schools and kept it there until Mr. Brontë entered frowning at the sight of his daughter and his curate *tête-à-tête*. Mr. Nicholls was withdrawn to the study.

That night when Tabitha and Martha had left the room after prayers Mr. Brontë lingered: "Charlotte, it is my desire that in future you will see as little as possible of Mr. Nicholls."

"Papa! I like and respect Mr. Nicholls!" It was one thing to keep the curate strictly on his own ground

of her own free will, but quite another to have his occasional calls vetoed.

"He is presuming—a fellow with a beggarly hundred a year. You are my daughter and there is your position as Currer Bell to be remembered. . . . I await your promise, Charlotte."

"Who that does not know the future dare make promises, Papa—not I!"

Mr. Brontë began to shake and the veins in his forehead stood out dangerously. Charlotte suddenly remembered a servant's tale overheard in childhood—how in a fit of anger, when his wife lay in childbed, Mr. Brontë had hacked a chair to pieces in her room; he looked capable of repeating the action now if his daughter continued to defy him. Instead he made an appeal to her strength:

"Charlotte—I shall sink if you fail me!"

"That I shall never do, Papa."

"Then give me your promise."

Oh, it was unfair, this tyranny of age! She hesitated. Yet, after all, did it matter whether she saw the curate again or not? And then, to her own surprise, she heard herself answer:

"No" . . . and then again—"No, Papa."

For a moment Mr. Brontë towered above his daughter, menacing in his wrath, then he turned and left the room without another word. She heard him dragging himself upstairs and only pride stopped her from running after him and offering the promise he had demanded. She left for London next morning with the depressing knowledge that she was in disgrace.

On the journey she read a recent number of the

"North British Review"; it was scarcely a good introduction, for a visit to the metropolis, although it began well enough:

> Jane Eyre . . . one of the most noteworthy of the many divinities which have latterly come crowding into our terrestrial halls . . . a pale grey-eyed girl rather under the middle height, irregular features, no pretensions to any kind of beauty but that of expression . . . a face showing character rather than the gentler and more lovable qualities. . . . Jane must be acquitted of the charge of conventional vulgarity which has been brought against her by our contemporary. . . . But there is a continual anxiety to display his (the author's) acquaintance with the social peculiarities of civilized life which we never find in those to whom they are habitual; there are observations upon blue crêpe dresses and other parts of female gear which would lead us to suppose that the book, if written by a man at all, was the production of a man milliner! . . .

Charlotte looked out of the window miserably; she was travelling fast to this great world wherein "Jane," it seemed, had made egregious mistakes. . . . She returned to her magazine and read on. . . .

> graver faults might have been attributed to 'Jane.' The matter-of-fact way in which she, a girl of nineteen, who has seen nothing of the world, received Mr. Rochester's revelations of his former life is both revolting and improbable. To a pure woman they would surely have soiled, for a time at least, the image of him who revealed them. . . .
>
> We cannot blame her for ultimately falling in love with Rochester, for in so doing she has done nothing more than every woman who has read the book since. Proud, tyrannical, violent and selfish as he was, he had the element of power which involuntarily and almost unconsciously (in a

woman's eyes) supplies the deficiency of every other good quality, and his system of wooing, apparently indifferent almost to rudeness, was consistent with the theory of the greatest masters of the art. . . .

Of the crime which Rochester committed in attempting to marry Jane while his wife was living we do not think it necessary to say much. A transgression of so heinous a nature as to come within the reach of even human laws is not likely to become attractive in the eyes of many. . . . There are more latent objections to the tendency of this powerful book which we are apt to overlook on a first perusal and of the perniciousness of which we can only judge properly when we have seen them develop in other works professedly proceeding from the same source. . . . In Jane Eyre herself there is a recklessness about right and wrong which is very alarming. . . .

Glancing overleaf Charlotte saw the names of her sisters' books.

. . . In the novels "Wuthering Heights" and the "Tenant of Wildfell Hall," these, like other faults of "Jane Eyre," are manifest a thousand fold, and the only consolation which we have in reflecting upon them is that they will never be very widely read. With "Wuthering Heights" we found it totally impossible to get along. It commences by introducing the reader to a perfect pandemonium of low brutal creatures who converse with each other in language too disgusting for the eye or ear to support. . . . How it terminates we do not know for the society which we encountered on our first introduction was so little to our taste that we took the liberty of declining the honour of further acquaintance . . .

'Oh, Emily, Emily, mine bonny love!' thought Charlotte, 'and Anne's book that she had written with aching heart and bitter tears hoping that it might save some

boy or girl from disaster as great as Branwell's! How little the world had understood.'

. . . "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall" has a better beginning and the conclusion is an unimpeachable instance of poetical justice, but in the body of the tale there are scenes in which the author seems to pride himself on bringing his reader into the closest possible proximity with naked vice, and there are conversations such as we had hoped never to see printed in England. There is a coarseness and brutality in the manner of speaking of almost all the characters never to be met with among gentlefolk however depraved.

Tears filled Charlotte's eyes, but she read on.

. . . if these books are the productions of a woman she must be a woman pretty nearly unsexed.

Charlotte dropped the review out on to the railway line and with a roar London was upon her. Had not Mr. Smith awaited her on the platform she might have taken the next train back to Yorkshire; as it was the unhappy little author steeled herself to go through the visit.

But some of her bitterness and fear left her when she reached Westbourne Place where the extravagant standard of living astonished her. Accustomed to Tabitha's cheeseparing economy in the use of tallow dips the sight of *two* long wax candles burning in her bedroom (which was already well lit by a blazing fire), impressed her as much as the welcome offered by Mrs. Smith. Charlotte assumed that her hostess had been well coached by her son as to the reception due to the distinguished Currer Bell.

Young Mr. Smith soon realized the trepidation hidden beneath his guest's stiff manner. Studying her unobtrusively he decided that she was cruelly aware of her own lack of social knowledge and would have given all her fame, even her genius, to have shone as a beautiful, self-possessed woman among those he was gathering to meet her. Mrs. Smith was as clear-sighted as her son, and the courageous determination with which the frightened guest faced the visit which was so much more ordeal than pleasure won her admiration; presently Charlotte realized that there was something deeper than courtesy in her hostess's manner.

'I believe she likes me!' she told herself, and in her loneliness was grateful.

Charlotte was almost happy when they let her sit quietly occupied with a piece of fancy-work, yet not too busy to watch the mother and son in whose relationship she found valuable material.

'Her's is a good face,' she decided, 'too marked for beauty perhaps, but showing sense and character. And his? pleasant to look at, especially for one claiming a right to his affection—health in his cheek, a sheen on his hair, eyes which might flash a lightning response to love, and a mouth to woo Destiny herself. With such a son no mother need fear the future—but did caprice lurk in the curve of the lips?' So, later, Currer Bell would write of 'Dr. John and Mrs. Bretton,' but as yet 'Villette' was stirring vaguely in her mind.

When Mr. Smith lighted his visitor upstairs with yet another wax candle, and wished her 'good night' at her bedroom door, criticism seemed disloyal.

Charlotte undressed and knelt to say her prayers feel-

ing that she had found friends: 'Do not let me demand too much!' she whispered. 'Let me be contented with a temperate draught of this living stream. Let me not run athirst, eager to drink passionately of its welcome waters—let me not imagine in them a sweeter taste than Earth's fountains know . . . Oh, would to God I may be enabled to feel sustained by occasional amicable intercourse—rare—brief—unengrossing and tranquil . . . quite tranquil!'

Never again must she ask more than friendship could give; never again must fire burn in her heart.

Chapter XXII

'FINE GENTLEMEN ALL'

Escorted now by Mr. Smith or Mr. Williams and now by Mr. Taylor, Charlotte was shown the sights of London. The Houses of Parliament newly arisen from the ashes of the great conflagration. The 'Zoo,' the National Gallery, various private exhibitions of famous pictures, and several theatres, but each carefully arranged pleasure proved more fatiguing than the last. Unusual hours, and the knowledge that although her wish for anonymity was respected many people recognized her as 'Currer Bell,' told on Charlotte's slender supply of strength, and she began to count the days till the end of the fortnight.

One afternoon, returning with a racking headache from some expedition, she found Mr. Thackeray and one or two other people in Mrs. Smith's drawing-room. In deference to the wish she had expressed there were no introductions, but the towering figure, and lionine head could not be mistaken. Shrinking behind her hostess Charlotte watched the author, believing herself safe from observation. He was 'not handsome, indeed almost ugly, and how stern in expression!'

Thackeray, too, was making observations; he saw Charlotte as a trembling little figure with great honest eyes and judged her to be indomitable of spirit and keen of inward vision.

Suddenly she found him beside her and all the sternness of expression vanished as he put out a big hand. She liked his firm grasp and friendly tone but could find no words in which to answer. Years later Thackeray would take delight in telling an apocryphal story of how, that fatal night, he had seen himself slip from the pedestal upon which Charlotte Brontë had placed him: "At dinner I had the miserable humiliation of seeing her ideal of me disappearing as everything went into my mouth and nothing came out, till at last she could endure it no longer. As I took my fifth potato she inclined towards me and with tearful eyes and clasped hands cried 'Oh, *don't* Mr. Thackeray! Please don't!'"

"And now, my dear Miss Brontë, you must meet a few more of our celebrities," said Mrs. Smith that night, but crushed with a sense of her own failure Charlotte shook her head.

"What? Not Mr. Charles Dickens?" asked Mr. Smith in surprise. "It is said that he is selling in monthly parts to the tune of 20,000 or 25,000 copies."

Charlotte phrased a polite but firm refusal.

"Mr. Carlyle then? I am sure you admire him?"

"I always wish he would write in plain English," said Charlotte, who had not learnt that the gift of speech was given her in order that she might conceal her thoughts.

"Then Mrs. Trollope, or perhaps Lady Morgan," suggested Mrs. Smith, breaking a pause.

"It would mean too much notoriety," said Charlotte, sitting very erect, and then she amazed both mother and son by saying that she would like to call upon Miss Harriet Martineau; it was the first wish she had expressed.

"It is said that he is selling in monthly parts to the tune of 20,000 or 25,000 copies."

"I have lively admiration and deep esteem for her character as revealed in her works," explained Charlotte, seeing her host's surprise.

"She is staying near us with her cousin Richard Martineau so we can send you in the carriage any day you like," promised Mr. Smith.

"I am sure she will be delighted to see you—perhaps you will send her a note?" suggested Mrs. Smith.

But in her note Charlotte gave no hint of her identity and the little group gathered about Miss Martineau to await the celebrity's arrival for six o'clock tea was agog with excitement. It seemed that a week or so before Miss Martineau had been the recipient of a copy of "Shirley" accompanied by a few lines written in the third person which she now produced:

"'Currer Bell offers a copy of "Shirley" to Miss Martineau's acceptance in acknowledgement of the pleasure and profit *she*—'"

"But the 'she' is crossed out," cried someone.

Miss Martineau nodded and continued: "'*she*' crossed out, 'he' substituted—'"*he*" has derived from her works. When Currer Bell first read "Deerbrook" *he* tasted a new and keen pleasure and a genuine benefit. In *his* mind "Deerbrook" ranks with those writings that have really done him good, added to his stock of ideas, and rectified his views of life.'"

"Then Currer Bell is a man?"

Miss Martineau held up her hand. "Wait," she said majestically. "In reply I used subtlety. The superscription was to 'Currer Bell, Esq.,' but *inside I wrote 'dear Madam'!*—And now this second letter: 'My dear Madam, the author happens to be in town for a few

days and has a strong wish to meet you. If you will permit me to call have the goodness to tell me when to come . . .' um—um—'do not think this request springs from idle curiosity. I hope that it has its origin in a better value. It would grieve me to lose this chance of seeing one whose works have so frequently made you the subjects of my thoughts.' Now what do you make of that?"

No one answered and Miss Martineau produced a third epistle:

" 'My dear Madam, I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you at six o'clock to-day.' "

"Brief and to the point—a man!" said Richard Martineau.

"No, my dear, for the concluding sentence runs: *'I shall try now to be happy until six o'clock comes!'*—Fie upon you all for having doubted," cried Miss Martineau and holding up "Jane Eyre" vowed that therein lay proof. "Who but a woman, or an upholsterer, knows how curtain rings should be sewn on?" she demanded.

But the clock struck, and almost as tne sixth stroke chimed a footman uttered an unintelligible name and the laughing group turned with one accord to meet a tall heavily built man who advanced into the circle with considerable aplomb.

There was an instant's pause and Miss Martineau sat down suddenly.

"Mr. Currer Bell?" said Richard Martineau interrogatively.

"I'll not believe it!" said his cousin unconsciously speaking aloud. *"This* the author of 'Jane Eyre'—impossible!"

"My name is Brough—Broughton—" stammered the stranger, "I've called, sir, about the subscription for the model lodging-house."

"It's a Mr. Broughton—for a subscription," someone explained into the ear-trumpet which Miss Martineau had temporarily forgotten.

"Richard, tell him to call to-morrow," ordered Miss Martineau and as the puzzled stranger passed down the steps he encountered a slight little figure with a noticeably high forehead and luminous eyes.

"Miss Brogden," announced the footman and Charlotte paused in the doorway for a moment and then moved swiftly forward towards Miss Martineau who sat enthroned upon the sofa.

Black-robed, but dainty in her exquisite neatness, shy and over-serious while among a group, Charlotte gradually became natural when the other visitors withdrew.

Over the sofa hung a portrait of Miss Martineau painted some years before and showing her still young, with high-piled dark hair; now (fourteen years Charlotte Brontë's senior), she wore a cap and used an ear-trumpet, but the eyes could laugh and the mouth was generous. Honesty seemed stamped on the brow and Charlotte looking from portrait to the sitter laid a daring hand on her new friend's knee. Here was a fellow-writer, a woman, and one to whom she could talk. Words poured out: how had she caused herself to be misunderstood? Why were her books described as 'coarse.' "It gives me a sort of heart-ache when I see 'Jane' called pernicious by earnest-minded men," said Charlotte passionately. "What do they mean when they charge me with trickery and artifice? It was not artifice

in me to write the tale—it was no trickery for Smith and Elder to publish it! My book is true. I admit that the character of the maniac is shocking, but," she added earnestly, "there is a phase of insanity which may be called moral madness in which all that is good, or even human, seems to disappear from the mind and a fiend nature replaces it . . . I *know!*—Surely this gives no ground for the reviewers' strictures?"

"No, my dear," said Harriet Martineau, "but——"

"What did *you* think of my 'Jane'?" interrupted Charlotte.

"It is a first-rate book," answered the older woman quietly.

"I am glad—glad and thankful," said Charlotte, flushing scarlet, "and now the 'but.' I beg you to speak frankly, Miss Martineau, we Bells love—honour—worship truth."

"In your books the love element is treated with unusual breadth," explained Miss Martineau (young Queen Victoria was reigning), "in fact that kind of intercourse is uncommon, and uncommonly described. I do *not* consider either 'Jane Eyre' or 'Shirley' could be properly described as 'coarse,' but I cannot answer for it that there are no traits which on a more leisurely reading I might not dislike on that ground," she ended firmly.

"May I beg that you will give my books this second reading?" asked Charlotte.

"On condition that you regard my criticisms as made through the eyes of your reviewers," said Miss Martineau.

"It would be a very terrible thing to overstep the

bounds of propriety," explained Charlotte gravely, "but I must use the language of Truth in preference to the jargon of conventionality. Unless I do, and dare to look beyond the greatest masters and study nature herself, I have no right to write. I must have something of my own to say, and a way of my own to say it, or I have no business to publish—but coarse—or lacking in womanly delicacy—No!"

Miss Martineau's promise to mention it if at any future time the elements of such faults appeared in her works soothed Charlotte; shyly she began to speak of her own loneliness; of Anne, whose "Agnes Grey" was the mirror of the soul of the writer; of Ellis—Emily, "The dearest thing in all the world to me," said Charlotte. "I let Anne go to God almost willingly; it seemed that she had been preparing all her life—but Emily I would have held back." A bond was loosened; presently Miss Martineau could almost see the remote parsonage whence her visitor came, the graves of her dead, the eccentric father who remained, and something of Currer Bell's fear of the strange world into which she had plunged to seek forgetfulness.

Miss Martineau talked in her turn. Her struggle for fame had been longer than Charlotte's. Publishers had been busy with the Reform Bill and none would give her a hearing. "I can remember defying Fate as I stood, faint and giddy, looking into a Shoreditch cabbage patch," she added, and then laughed. What magic was in this sprite to make her recall those long past years?

When Charlotte left friendship had been sealed. She drove back to Westbourne Terrace amazed at her own

temerity in having accepted Miss Martineau's invitation to visit her at Ambleside.

The afternoon had engendered an unusual feeling of confidence and she looked almost pretty that night as she came down to dinner, but panic seized her as she glanced around the drawing-room and learnt that five out of the seven men present were critics. She could not, no she would not, sit at her host's right hand the cynosure of all eyes. Deliberately passing the place that should have been hers Charlotte sought shelter beside Mrs. Smith, who, catching her guest's beseeching glance, accepted the unusual arrangement with smiling equanimity.

As the meal progressed Charlote identified the diners. "The Times," "Athenaeum," "Spectator," "Examiner" and "Atlas" were all represented. 'Fine gentlemen, all,' she told herself, 'and prodigiously civil now, face to face with Currer Bell, although some of them had trounced her soundly in print.' Her scorn increased as she watched them. How pettily arrogant were these men so dreaded in the world of letters compared with a William Makepeace Thackeray!

George Smith was an excellent host and his guests talked brilliantly, all save the guest of honour. Now one, now another made an effort to draw Charlotte into the conversation:

How fortunate that she had come at a season when she could see Macready in both Macbeth and Othello —had she been entranced? There was a pause and, forced to answer, Charlotte cast a bombshell. She had found the great actor false and artificial, nor did she consider that the cast, as a whole, fully understood the

Shakespearian tragedies. The challenge was not taken up, but as she sat crumbling her bread Charlotte felt many eyes upon her. Conversation swerved to the poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and someone quoted a few lines for Charlotte's benefit. Cruelly conscious of the general attitude towards her former effort at criticism Charlotte forced herself to be honest. Admiration for such writings must pass; poems which were wordy and obscure could not live. So said this small Daniel come to judgment in a steady voice but with trembling hands.

She noticed the quizzical lift of an eyebrow here and there before a *bon mot* from Mr. Smith set the conversational ball rolling once more. It was wiser to let the little oddity remain silent, thought one—Thackeray's mistress? The question had been in several minds that night, but now Charlotte had cleared herself. Impossible! Impossible!

Light swift badinage swept over her head; she wondered at the provincialism of these Londoners so taken up were they with people and things of small importance, and yet she felt excited beyond all reason.

A sleepless night resulted, and she looked so jaded next morning that Mrs. Smith urged her to remain another day, but Charlotte was stricken with a sense of defeat. Much had been expected of Currer Bell and she, Charlotte Brontë, had failed her.

Remembrance of the previous evening was bitter. She craved for the moors; for the home which was still home though half-inhabited—and perhaps Ellen Nussey would come to admire her and assuage her own lost self-respect! Why had she not been able to confound

the men she despised? Why had words failed her with Mr. Thackeray? She tortured herself as the train plodded on. 'Oh, woe, woe to him who thinks of himself in the presence of intellectual greatness!'

Exhaustion forced her to break the journey at Derby.

Chapter XXIII

'SAUCY PAT'

Welcoming his daughter home Mr. Brontë gave no hint that there had been something of a scene between them on the eve of parting. He was avid for details of her experiences and ruthless in his catechizing as to whom she had met. Thackeray, Miss Harriet Martineau, the leading critics of the day? It was well, but no titled people? Strange that Mr. Smith had not managed better.

Charlotte was uncomfortably aware that she had not satisfied her father's expectations.

It was a blessed day when Ellen Nussey arrived bringing the balm of uncritical admiration and a fund of anecdotes as to "Shirley" now being widely read in Dewsbury and Birdstall where the chapters descriptive of the curates were particularly appreciated.

"Had Currer Bell written all he has seen and known concerning those worthies a singular book would have been the result," said Charlotte oracularly. She felt comforted already, and was willing to listen in return to the trivial love affairs of Ellen's brothers.

It was well that Ellen was uncritical for at a casual meeting with Miss Wooler Charlotte was badly hurt; the good little lady came protesting that, come what might, her old pupil should never lose her esteem, despite the fact that she was the reputed author of "Jane Eyre" and "Shirley."

"There is nothing in what I have written to incur just forfeiture of esteem," protested Charlotte; "it is only to the coarse minded that my books seem coarse."

"Let us drop the subject, Charlotte," said Miss Wooler. "We must all of us make mistakes sometimes. See, I have brought a new crochet pattern to show you."

"Sir James and Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, my daughter," said Mr. Brontë, and Miss Wooler faded out of the picture as Charlotte felt her hand kissed by a courtly gentleman with a fine bedside manner.

"We have been reading these wonderful books," explained Lady Kay-Shuttleworth," and my husband wished to see the scenery which you have described so excellently."

Having slipped away to give directions about tea Charlotte re-entered in time to hear her father pledging her to a visit.

"Oh no, Papa, indeed I cannot go!" she exclaimed in bewildered alarm.

But Sir James would take no denial. "As a physician permit me to advise change of air and scene," he said gently.

"I cannot leave my father," protested Charlotte.

"You are over-anxious, my child; our servants are perfectly reliable," said Mr. Brontë benignly.

"I am sure you will find a few days with us very beneficial," said Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, taking the cue from her husband.

"Why not drive back with us now?" inquired Sir James.

But at this Charlotte rebelled. If go she must, it

should not be until the morrow; and then not for more than three days.

The uninvited guests departed, and Charlotte turned on her father with reproach. Why did he desire that she should do this thing? Why must she go again among strangers?

"It is due to your position as my daughter and Currer Bell that you should appear into good society," said Mr. Brontë, preparing to retire to his study. "Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth is a baronet whose creation dates from Richard III."

"I wish it were well over!" said Charlotte, contemplating the ordeal before her, but Gawthorpe Hall, mellowed by three centuries of wind and weather, fascinated her and she would have enjoyed the experience if she had not felt that she had been stolen away against her will. As it was she showed no softness to host or hostess; once she would have accepted them both at their surface value; now, she told herself that Sir James's smile was too frequent, and that neither dignity nor fine feeling were among Lady Kay-Shuttleworth's characteristics. She felt more at home with the pale German governess than with either of them, and sympathized with the young foreigner's attempts to control Sir James's four children.

'Indiscriminate visiting tends only to waste of time and the vulgarizing of character,' Charlotte told herself when after three long days she set out on the drive home. How was it that she had permitted Sir James to extract a half-promise to be his guest in London and to visit his lakeside home?

Her first thought on entering the parsonage was for

letters. Who would have written to her, Mr. Smith or Mr. Williams? Instead she found a box of books. 'Oh, that Emily and Anne were there to read with me!' she thought lifting out volume after volume. 'Happiness quite unshared has no *taste*,' she complained, and opened "Emma" to shake her head once more over Jane Austen as a writer, although ready to admit that that lady knew her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well.

That evening, when Mr. Brontë looked in to say good night to his solitary daughter, he brought her a packet of old letters. She sat alone in the silent house reading them far into the night with Flossie at her feet and Keeper wandering up and down the stairs to Emily's door.

The ink was faded and the paper yellow, Charlotte touched with gentle fingers letters written before her own birth by the shadowy mother who had been buried thirty years ago.

Poor little dead mother with her delicate reticence and her fervour of love!

'Oh what a sacred pleasure there is in the idea of spending eternity together in perfect and uninterrupted bliss.' . . . Was it unmaidenly to say so much? asked the writer.

Charlotte tried to imagine the tone of her father's reply and failed, but a succeeding letter told her much; evidently Maria Branwell had not been over-forward: 'My heart smote me for having used too much reserve towards you,' she wrote. 'Do you think you have any cause to complain of me? If you do, let me know it, for where it is in my power to prevent it I would in no

one instance occasion you the least pain or uneasiness . . . I am certain no one ever loved you with an affection more pure, constant, tender and ardent than that which I feel.' . . . And then the old hesitation once more: 'Surely this is not saying too much? It is the truth and I trust you are worthy to know it.' . . . What happiness to receive such a letter, thought Charlotte, and what joy to be permitted to write it; a surge of longing swept her. Life was passing; she was thirty-four years old!

Turning a page she strained her eyes to decipher the faded delicate writing: 'I long to improve every religious and moral quality that I may be a help, and if possible an ornament, to you.'

Oh, brave, gallant little mother, Charlotte could understand her passion of desire. She read on and on. Now Emily seemed to be speaking, but more frankly than Emily had ever spoken; now Anne, and now herself; the influence of hereditary was strong.

One more letter. Charlotte unfolded it carefully. 'Dear Saucy Pat'—she read the phrase twice in her amazement. 'Dear Saucy Pat'!—What manner of man could her father have been in those long-past days? She tried to envisage him, young, handsome, ambitious, even hopeful, but the gaunt figure she knew came between her and Imagination. 'Saucy Pat'—and now white-haired and with weak eyes, querulous when he did not get his own way, and often tyrannical. He too had missed something in life, and missed it when it was within his grasp. Charlotte laid aside the letters and drew out a miniature of the almost forgotten mother. She smiled up into her daughter's face, and

Charlotte saw a shrinking, sensitive child of sixteen or seventeen in a high-waisted low-necked frock.

"Poor Papa!" said Charlotte suddenly. He had never learnt that while Love was stronger than cruelty, stronger than Death itself, it perished under petty meanness; Pity could take love's place, but Pity was not Love.

Putting out the lamp she felt her way up the dark stairs, followed by Keeper.

"Poor Papa!" She lingered at his door in mute prayer. 'Currer Bell' to the outside world, Charlotte Brontë here, and her father's only surviving child.

Chapter XXIV

THACKERAY'S CREED

Spring swept over the moors, the mists lifted from the valleys and the hills changed colour a thousand times a day beneath the vast canopy of the sky the line of which was clear against the hills; neither building nor tree obscured the line of vision.

The household at the parsonage had suffered the usual crop of winter ills; Mr. Brontë had had bronchitis, Charlotte influenza and Martha neuralgia, Tabby alone had been immune.

On a day when it was almost warm Charlotte walked and climbed the slippery path to the crags of Ponden Kirk.[1] She looked towards the arch (by the passage of which, superstitious village girls believed they might win their way to matrimony within the year) and walked on into the trackless wilderness, circling over the moors. Emily seemed very near. Was that a lapwing circling above her head? Emily would have known, Charlotte herself was too short-sighted to see. Emily's verses (or 'rhymes' as she had persisted in calling them), rang in Charlotte's ears:

Awaken, o'er all my dear moorland
West wind in thy glory and pride
Oh, call me from valley and lowland
To walk up the hill torrent's side!

[1] Ponden Hall beneath the crags is 'Thrushcross Grange' of "Wuthering Heights."

She repeated the lines as she struggled on against the wind and started when a sudden turn in the contour of a rock revealed Mr. Nicholls who, it seemed, had been visiting an outlying parishioner. The encounter was unfortunate, for although Charlotte had refused to give the promise her father had tried to extract she had succeeded hitherto in avoiding the curate. Now Mr. Nicholls showed pleasure in the encounter; he suited his pace to hers and Charlotte was amazed to find how easily the difficulties of the path were surmounted when a ready hand offered assistance.

Sitting over her lonely meal an hour later, she wished that she could have invited Mr. Nicholls to share it; as it was, she had seen him leave the precincts with considerable relief. There was certainly a good deal more in him than she had thought, although she had drawn this curate in a more favourable light than the others. He had talked of his Irish home and of Irish characteristics as compared with those of Yorkshire men; of Irish proverbs and Yorkshire sayings—'Keep a stone in thy pocket seven years, turn it and keep it seven years longer that it may be ever ready to thine hand when thy enemy draws near.' To his mind, said Mr. Nicholls, it was typically of the Haworth villagers amongst whom he had first heard it. Then, somehow, the positions had reversed themselves and Charlotte had done the talking. She had told him that often, as she sat in church or slipped from tombstone to tombstone to find refuge in the parsonage, she was aware of the stares of strangers who, on pretence of seeing the old black pews, or the stone from which Wesley and Whitfield had preached, came to spy on 'Currer Bell.'

Many a coin clinked in Brown's hand as he pointed her out. Mr. Nicholls had understood her feelings; Mr. Nicholls had offered tactful sympathy; to him she was all woman.

Another visit to London was in sight and Charlotte was gathering her courage. This time she was resolved to enjoy more and suffer less; to meet people and show herself unafraid.

As originally arranged she would have driven down with the Kay-Shuttleworths, spending a week on the road and stopping overnight with the good baronet's friends, but this (to Charlotte's relief and Mr. Brontë's disappointment) had fallen through; she was now to be allowed to go direct to the Smiths' new home in Gloucester Place. With her mind on the visit she looked through the contents of the post-bag which throughout the lonely winter had been the chief event of her days. It was a blessing that correspondents could now prepay postage, thought Charlotte thriftily, for "Shirley" had added considerably to her circle of admirers. Harriet Martineau, Mr. Smith, Mr. Williams, Mr. Taylor —strange little man—had all written regularly. A Peace Conference had requested the honour of Currer Bell's presence on its platform and an enthusiastic youth wrote from Cambridge vowing that he had adopted "Jane Eyre," "Shirley Keeldar," and "Caroline Helstone" as his dream sisters. Reviews too, were still coming in. She took up the "Edinburgh" with an anticipation of pleasure, hoping that it contained an article by George Henry Lewes which she had been expecting for some time. She knew his position in the literary

world now, and had read his books "Ranthorpe" and "Rose Blanche and Violet," imagining that she saw the author's character on every page. He differed from Thackeray in as much as he sometimes took a French pen in his hand while the Titan always used an English quill, but he was a sagacious observer with a high standard of talent and should be given attention when he laid down the law upon principles though not when he dogmatized about feeling—there he was at fault. Still, how kind and generous he had been in his former reviews! She had not forgotten Lewes' warning to avoid melodrama and hoped to succeed in the book now stirring in her brain unless some unexpected influence seized her pen; Charlotte had learnt that authors are more at the mercy of their characters than readers know.

It would be pleasant to meet George Henry Lewes when she went to London.

Opening the review Charlotte felt that she had been stabbed in the back, the headlines startled her: 'Faults of the Work Hastiness and Incoherence . . . Sins against Truth and Nature'—and what had "Shirley" to do with 'The Mental Equality of the Sexes' and 'Female Literature.' Had not even Lewes realized that Currer Bell was to be judged as author, not woman? Charlotte began to read:

> The gallant suggestion of our peasant poet that Nature 'tried her prentice hand' on man before venturing on the finer task of fashioning woman has not yet found acceptance otherwise than as a sporting caprice of fancy. . . . Men in general, when serious and *not* gallant are slow to admit women even to equality with themselves; and the prevalent opinion certainly is that women are inferior in

respect of intellect. . . . The grand function of woman it must always be recollected is and ever must be *maternity* . . . most endearing chain . . . a high and holy office. . . . All women are intended by Nature to be mothers . . . these thoughts suggested by the book now before us, "Jane Eyre" by Currer Bell, one of the most remarkable of *female* writers . . . a great part of its success due to its reality. Here is a voice speaking to thousands. . . . Despite faults of taste, faults of ignorance . . . a book of singular fascination. A more masculine book in sense of vigour was never written—vigour which often amounts to coarseness and is certainly the very antipode of 'Ladylike.' . . . This masculine vigour, even more prominent in "Shirley" does not increase the pleasantness of the book. . . . Power it has unquestionably, and interest too of a peculiar sort . . . power unmistakable but often misapplied. Currer Bell must learn to sacrifice a little of the Yorkshire roughness to the demands of good taste. . . .

And now for a note of praise, Helstone, straight as a ramrod, keen as a kite . . . the patient, frugal beneficent old maid Miss Ainley, Louis Moore, a very small person indeed . . . Robert disgraced by a sordid love of money . . . the horoines more lovable. 'Shirley,' if she did not occasionally use language one would rather not hear from the lips of a lady . . . Caroline Helstone . . . Mrs. Pryor as true to the universal laws of our common nature as if they had been drawn by the clumsy hand of a male. . . . But Mrs. Pryor an unnatural mother. . . . Currer Bell! If under your heart had ever stirred a child, if to your bosom a babe had ever been pressed, never could you have imagined such a falsehood as this! . . .

Charlotte could bear no more. Oh, there were passages he had done wrong to write! Had he never checked his pen to think how his reckless eloquence might sting? With brimming eyes and quivering lips she opened her desk. Her letter should be brief but

to the point; it should show her just anger but not her grief:

To G. H. Lewes, Esq.

I can be on my guard against my enemies, but God deliver me from my friends!

CURRER BELL.

It should go at once, as fast as the mail could travel. She wished him to know her attitude before there was risk of a meeting.

But when they met Charlotte's anger faded suddenly, for, in some odd turn of Lewes's head, she was reminded of her sister Emily. No, the foundation of Lewes's character could not be bad, although she sorrowfully decided that he was conceited, crude and ignorant. He saw her 'tired with the weight of her own brains,' and forgot her within the hour when he dropped in at Fleet Street to talk to a new friend, one Mary Anne Evans.

The Smiths found Charlotte older, more sophisticated, and braver than on her previous visit, also a trifle censorious. Indeed, she behaved so valiantly that her publisher ventured on a ball to which Mr. Williams brought all his array of daughters. They amazed Charlotte by 'the ease and gentility of their manners,' nor was she afraid to offer advice as to their future from out of the well of her own experience. "If Fanny or Louisa wish to be governesses let them by all means," said Charlotte emphatically. "The girl who stays at home is worse off than the hardest-worked, worst-paid drudge in a school."

Fanny and Louisa, pink and white in their débutante frocks, looked at this authority with awed eyes; but Charlotte's words were not such as fanned the flame of youthful independence. "You may suffer when you go into your first situation," she said, remembering her own tears. "'Tis a hard thing for flesh and blood to leave home, especially a *good* home—not a wealthy or a splendid home. My home is humble and unattractive to strangers, but to me, when I had to leave it, it contained the profound and intense affection that brothers and sisters feel for each other when they are cast in the same mould. Perhaps yours is the same?"

"Yes, Miss Brontë," said Fanny in a small voice.

"A governess's experiences are frequently bitter," Charlotte assured the girl, "but the results are precious. I have known many who were unhappy as governesses, but not one who regretted having undergone the ordeal. Teach her to be undaunted," she went on, turning to Mr. Williams, "and do not let her waste her young life in trying to obtain manifold accomplishments. I count it absurd, even cruel, that the Governesses' Institute, an excellent body in some ways, should endeavour to raise the standard of accomplishments. What a governess requires is health, strength, cheerfulness, self-control, endurance—even fortitude. . . . Teach her to say 'I submit.'"

Never before had Charlotte found herself so fluent or impressive. Fanny slipped away to the shelter of her mother's wide skirts, but the memory of her own oration helped Charlotte through the evening. She was still valiant when Thackeray came to pay a morning call.

Chaperoned by Mr. Smith Charlotte received him, ready, even eager to talk. She had read his Christmas Book and it had shocked her, now, an opening was provided by Mr. Smith who mentioned "Pendennis" (then appearing serially), and so earnest as to be unconscious of herself, Charlotte took the author to task for his literary shortcomings:

"When you write, Mr. Thackeray, I believe that Mephistopheles stands on your right hand and Raphael on your left," she told him. "Usually the great doubter guides your pen, and then the Angel interlines here and there."

Thackeray was willing to grant that "Pendennis" was not all it should be: "It drags in the middle, I was ill and could not make it better—still, Miss Brontë, it is wonderfully well written on the whole," he protested, half-laughing. "I know I wept over Helen Pendennis's death."

But Charlotte continued to release her shafts: Why did he permit himself to overshadow his pages with cynicism? She leant forward with shining eyes.

'What a little Jeanne d'Arc she is,' thought Thackeray, 'idealistic, pure of mind, hating falsehood and affectations, ready to judge all London by some high standard of her own, yet emotional and apt to make wrong deductions from false premises.'

It was a queer scene and Mr. Smith looked on in amusement while the Yorkshire sprite let fly her barbs, some of which struck home. She was five years Thackeray's junior and he had struggled for ten years to obtain a hearing while she had reached fame at a bound.

"Shall I tell you my creed as a literary man?" he asked her.

"Oh, Mr. Thackeray, I wish your strong wings would lift you oftener above the smoke of cities into regions nearer Heaven!"

Thackeray stood towering before her. His eyes were keen behind his spectacles and the mobile lips were firm.

"Shall I tell you my creed as a literary man?" he asked her and Charlotte nodded assent. "To tell the truth as I see it, describing what I see; to hit no foul blow; to condescend to no servile puffery; never to be false to that calling in which it has pleased Heaven to place me; never to do treason to that conscience that says men are weak; that faults must be owned; that pardon must be prayed for and that Love is over all. . . . To do my work honestly. To die when the time comes and go hence with as clean a breast as man may have. Let us think of our calling with a solemn and a humble heart. God give us strength to guard the honour of our flag."

"Amen," said Charlotte Brontë, deeply stirred.

"An awful responsibility rests upon a writer," said Thackeray gently. His words go forth to vast congregations of mankind; to grown folk; to children and perhaps their children's children. Love and truth should guide us." He bowed over the little hand she offered. "*Au revoir,* Miss Brontë. We meet later, since you dine to-night in Young Street."

Chapter XXV

"ARE YOU CONSIDERING MARRIAGE, CHARLOTTE?"

By nightfall all Charlotte Brontë's gaucherie had returned. She went to Young Street uneasily aware that Thackeray had gathered a brilliant company to meet her.

It was a hot summer evening, doors and windows stood wide open and Thackeray's young daughters kept watch for the arrival of the important guest.

"She comes—in mittens, silence and seriousness!" announced Anne Thackeray, peeping from the window, and her clear tones floated out to Charlotte hesitating below; it was an inauspicious beginning. Thackeray hastened to meet her, offered his arm which she could scarcely reach, and spoke of her as Currer Bell.

Already unnerved Charlotte answered that she had come there as Miss Brontë and would admit no connection between herself and the person called Currer Bell. What would Mr. Thackeray think, she asked in mournful reproach, if *she* addressed *him* as Arthur Pendennis or Mr. Warrington?

Worse followed. Not all Jane Welsh Carlyle's sparkle could lighten the heavy atmosphere and Mrs. Procter's well-meant attempts to draw Charlotte into the conversation failed dismally.

"Do you like London, Miss Brontë?" asked Mrs. Brookfield in a devastating silence.

"Yes—and *no*," answered Charlotte, strictly non-

committal. Drawing away from her interlocutor she found refuge with Anne Thackeray's surprised governess who sat busy with her tatting at a distant table. The lamp began to smoke.

Somehow, some time, the nightmare evening ended and Charlotte was placed in Mr. Smith's carriage to return to the haven of his home. Thackeray saw her drive away and stood hesitating on his own doorstep. No, he could not face the circle above stairs! Warily, guiltily he stole away to his club.

Charlotte had hardly recovered from the effects of the evening in Young Street before she was sent to sit for her portrait, and Richmond found her a hopeless subject. His efforts to interest her had little effect and no anecdote moved her to laughter. She sat looking straight before her, slim, dainty, neat, but expressionless with unfathomable eyes, until at the third sitting a chance remark told her that the Duke of Wellington had just left the studio; had she arrived two minutes earlier they must have met.

"Oh, Mr. Richmond!" Colour flushed into her pale cheeks, alert, eager, the whole face alive with interest Charlotte plied the artist with questions. He sketched hastily while cudgelling his brains for Wellingtoniana. A week later Charlotte saw the Duke at the Chapel Royal; it was the culminating moment of her London visit and almost blotted out the haunting memory of that catastrophic evening party. Then, just as she was preparing to return to Yorkshire, Mr. Smith, who knew that Sir Walter Scott was another of Charlotte's heroes, made the casual suggestion that one

of his sisters and Miss Brontë should accompany him north (where he was going to fetch a young brother from an Edinburgh school), and 'do' both Melrose and Abbotsford. The idea seemed so preposterous that Charlotte refused to contemplate it, but on the morrow Mrs. Smith mentioned the subject.

"My son hopes that you will reconsider your refusal, Miss Brontë, and for myself I may say that I feel sure you would find Abbotsford very interesting."

Charlotte listened in surprised silence and Mrs. Smith continued her monologue. Edinburgh was a fine city, the view from Arthur's Seat unique, and Melrose Abbey quite one of the gems of the North. Why not go when opportunity arose?

Why not indeed, when Melrose and Abbotsford were as music in her ears? If Mrs. Smith viewed the project with such serenity Charlotte could only suppose that her young publisher had proposed it in single-minded kindness and that the conventions of London differed materially from those of the provinces. With the reflection that her own complete lack of pretensions to beauty, and Mr. Smith's obvious juvenility should be sufficient safeguard against scandal (even without the protection of a sister), Charlotte accepted the invitation. She returned home in some trepidation, but Mr. Brontë accepted without dismay the fact of her going on to Edinburgh almost immediately. It was not until his daughter returned, after an ever-memorable two days of sightseeing, that he expressed anxiety.

During her absence a gift of the crayon drawing by Richmond had reached Mr. Brontë, sent by Mr. Smith's order. Now he viewed it critically, comparing it with

the original, and came to the conclusion that it was far from flattering although the expression was life-like, then pushing the drawing aside he asked a question for which Charlotte was totally unprepared.

"Are you considering marriage, Charlotte?"

"No, Papa!"

"Charlotte, this is a matter of extreme importance to me. Have you received any overtures?"

"No, Papa."

Mr. Brontë left the room without another word and Charlotte opened her desk to write a letter of thanks. Her heart beat a trifle fast and she wrote with difficulty. How kind young George Smith had been as they climbed Arthur's Seat together, and how wonderful had been the walk with him along the 'Royal Mile.' Edinburgh compared to London was as a vivid page of history set against a dull treatise on political economy.

Mr. Brontë too was writing to Cornhill. The portrait of his daughter should be laid among his most valued possessions. He could say that he found it a correct likeness, indeed a graphic representation of mind as well as matter: 'I fancy I see in it strong indications of the genius of the author of "Jane Eyre" and "Shirley,"' he concluded.

Martha sidled into the dining-room ostensibly to replenish the supply of peat, actually to poke up the fire and ask leading questions. Yes, her mistress had seen all the sights of London and likewise many great lords and ladies when she went to the opera:

"But except for their elegant clothes, Martha, I do not think them either much better or much worse than other people," said Charlotte Brontë.

It was difficult to pick up the threads of life at the parsonage after six weeks' absence, and the weather was depressing; thunderstorms swept Haworth Moor and Charlotte found herself a prisoner dependent for society upon Tabitha. Mr. Brontë rarely left the seclusion of his study, and on Mr. Nicholls's visits to the parsonage he was not shown into the room where Charlotte sat. She came to the conclusion that the curate had been requested to attend strictly to parochial duties; occasionally she felt his eyes resting upon her in church, but he made no effort to speak to her.

From her black oak pew Charlotte could see the tablet commemorative of her dead; five out of the sexet of which she was one, and their mother: 'Maria Brontë whose Soul departed to the Saviour on September 15th, 1821 in the 39th year of her age. Be ye also ready for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.' Charlotte knew the words by heart, but never before had she realized that she was now within a few years of her mother's age. 'Be ye also ready,' she repeated; perhaps since sickness, decay and the struggle of the flesh must come to all it was well that she was solitary; human love must needs bind one to the world.

She looked up at the father standing above her in the three-decked pulpit and behind him saw the ghosts of his predecessors, among them, Mr. Grimshaw, whose name the old villagers still held in reverence. He had held the parish in such strict control that when the horse of a traveller cast a shoe on the Sabbath day no smith would give service without the pastor's permission; no, not for thrice the usual fee.

Mr. Brontë pronounced the benediction and the con-

gregation filed out; Mr. Grimshaw's concluding prayer had been more intimate:

'Lord, dismiss us with thy blessing. Take all these people into thy care, bring them in safety to their own homes and give them their suppers when they get home, but let them not eat a meal until they have said grace. Let them then eat and be satisfied and return thanks to thee when they are done. Let them kneel down and say their prayers before they go to bed; in their clothes for once at any rate, and then thou wilt preserve them until morning.'

As Charlotte waited for her father in the empty church Mr. Nicholls appeared out of the shadows, took her prayer-book, laid a tiny spray of white heather between the leaves, handed it back, bowed and was gone before she had time to recover from her surprise. But the strange little incident did not divert her morbid train of thought and when, a few days later, another invitation arrived from the Kay-Shuttleworths, who had taken a house in the Lake district, she was ready to acquiesce in her father's wish that it should be accepted.

Upon arrival she found the governess hovering in the background eager to offer a shy welcome—and felt flattered at the girl's pleasure in a second meeting. Lady Kay-Shuttleworth was secluded, suffering from an attack of influenza, but Sir James, with his wide smile, announced that he had secured a second guest whom he felt sure Miss Brontë would be delighted to meet. Mrs. Gaskell, authoress of "Mary Barton," would arrive on the following day.

Charlotte was pleased. Mrs. Gaskell's friendly let-

ters were among her treasures and she was glad to think that she would not be thrown entirely upon Sir James for society, having decided that beneath that gentleman's surface kindness lay a character as hard as flint; he was a man 'who, if once offended, would only accord forgiveness in exchange for servile submission.'

Mrs. Gaskell appeared and Charlotte observed her warily: 'A woman of genuine talent, cheerful, cordial in her manners, and I believe of a kind and good heart,' she decided as her nimble fingers knitted a sock. Mrs. Gaskell, ostensibly talking to Sir James, was equally observant. She saw a thin little lady with soft brown hair, a square forehead, broad and rather overhanging, notably direct eyes and an over-large mouth—'But oh, what a sweet voice,' she said to herself as Charlotte uttered a few shy words.

Lady Kay-Shuttleworth did not make a quick recovery and while Mrs. Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë drove about the country with Sir James, or drifted on the lake, they laid the foundations of a friendship which was to affect the literary world for a generation. In an occasional hour by her hostess's bedside, Mrs. Gaskell added to her impressions, and when she returned to Manchester she carried with her a vivid mind-picture of the bleak village of grey stone cottages above which Charlotte Brontë lived with her father; her heart ached for the lonely little woman and she grieved that suffering had stamped out every spark of the merriment which should have lurked behind the soft eyes that looked so straight into her own.

They talked of their own works, of the book which

Charlotte hoped to write at the conclusion of her visit; of "Modern Painters," and the newly published "In Memoriam." Charlotte, who had laid the poem aside half read, shook her head doubtfully:

"It seems to me that bitter sorrow, while recent, does not flow out in verse," she said, watching the shadows fall across the lake.

"Tennyson is in the neighbourhood, we might call," suggested Sir James, but half-way there, rain swept the hills, and it seemed wiser to turn back. It was well, for on the morrow the party was to go to Fox How where Mrs. Arnold was 'At Home' with her family, and already Charlotte was dreading the ordeal. When the hour came every faculty was dormant except observant criticism.

Mrs. Arnold failed lamentably to come up to her expectations; she seemed good and amiable but without completeness of character, and the intellectual was certainly not her *forte*. Charlotte had anticipated that the life-companion of Dr. Arnold would have been noticeably superior. As for Mr. Matthew Arnold who had recently published "The Strayed Reveller" (a book of verse of which Charlotte had never heard) she was willing to accept Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth's assurance that he improved upon acquaintance. The young man's manner displeased her with its seeming foppery, and Charlotte was led to understand that his theological opinions were vague and unsettled.

It was a relief when the evening was over, and a greater relief to return to the parsonage where she found her father in a state of flattered excitement as the result of a visit from a group of his daughter's un-

known admirers among whom was Lord John Manners 'bearing a brace of pheasants.'

Among the pile of letters awaiting her was one from Ellen. In some mysterious way Mr. Brontë's anxiety concerning those possible matrimonial overtures which might have been made to his daughter had reached her friend.

Charlotte pointed to the barrier of age—George Smith was twenty-seven, and she thirty-five—and vowed that she was contented with his friendship: 'May God give me the common sense to look upon one so young, so rising and so helpful in no other light,' she added, and bade Ellen stop this twaddle about marriage.

'Doubtless there are men whom if I chose to encourage I *might* marry,' said Charlotte Brontë with fine truthfulness, 'but no matrimonial lot is ever remotely offered to me which seems truly desirable—and even if one were, there would be many obstacles; the least allusion to such a possibility is offensive to Papa.'

She forgot Ellen's anxious inquiries in the interest of an article which appeared in the "Palladium," a new monthly dating from Edinburgh. The writer had found "Jane Eyre" a wonderful book. He linked Currer Bell with Thackeray and foretold that both would be read by posterity. Here was a critic with insight; Charlotte read on with heightened colour:

> . . . the author has no living rival in the faculty of imposing belief . . . in proportion to her excellence as a narrator is her power for good or evil.

That was a phrase to make one think:

> . . . in the measure of that power and of its responsibility must be the interest she creates in those who look anxiously on a generation which, having thrown to the winds the folly and the wisdom of its fathers, is in the awful predicament of learning all things anew.

'Splendid,' said Charlotte, but in the next paragraph the emphasis was laid on sex once more:

> . . . Currer Bell is a woman. Every word she utters is female. Not feminine but female; there is a sex about it which cannot be mistaken . . . an involuntary revelation of the heart of a woman. . . . Only a woman could show man as she shows him! The landscape is too near US for it to glow with purple light! WE cannot make a religion of man, for, to us, he has no mysteries. We hear no oracles where we have so often smelt the stench under the tripod. . . . Currer Bell is not so troubled; she thinks of man with all the blissful ignorance of a boy's dreams of woman. He comes and she owns her master. Currer Bell is thus a woman and a young woman, with a heart (when she wrote "Jane Eyre") as yet unengaged, though perhaps not wholly unsmitten! . . .

This was not so pleasant, but on reading the next page Charlotte forgot and forgave. The writer had read "Shirley" and "Wuthering Heights," and praised them, although he was inclined to believe all the three novels had been written by one hand. "Wuthering Heights" was described as

> the flight of a fancy fluttering in the exultation of young wings, a youthful story written for one's own self in solitude and thrown aside till other successes recalled it to mind.

One takes up the book and lays it down; but there are things in it which one can lay down no more. . . . Catherine Earnshaw . . . her memory is chaste as the loyalty of love; pure as the air of the heights in which she dwells . . . the story a world of brilliant figures in atmosphere and mist; the unformed writing of a giant hand and the 'large utterance' of a baby god! . . . passages in the book of which any novelist past or present might be proud; few things to surpass certain pages.

Currer Bell was besought to write her next novel in the same frame of mind as she had written the first uninfluenced by the dangerous *furore* she had occasioned:

Let her rejoice if she can again give us such an elaboration of a rare and fearful form of mental disease. It had been said of Shakespeare that he drew cases a physician might have studied. Currer Bell had done no less.

"Not Currer—Ellis! Ellis!" exclaimed Charlotte, remembering the pain in Emily's sombre eyes as she had read the first criticisms levelled against the book that bore the *nom-de-plume* she had chosen.

There was a great future before Currer Bell and the writer wished her God-speed in her evangelism. His last message was *Wait*.

Having learnt that you have the power to labour let that tremendous knowledge beget in you an unconquerable patience. Stand and grow under the weight of your responsibilities; get accustomed to the knowledge of your power. Learn that for gods and men there is but one way to immortality. Do not try to give largesse out of an exhausted treasury.

'I will not . . . I will not!' vowed Charlotte from her knees.

George Smith, too, had read the "Palladium" article. He wrote to inform Charlotte that it was by Sidney Dobell and to suggest issuing a new edition of "Wuthering Heights" and "Agnes Grey" under the ægis of Smith and Elder, provided that Charlotte would contribute a biographical notice of her sisters. She took up the idea eagerly, the world should know Emily who had died with all her music in her save one book and a few poems.

Chapter XXVI

HEATHCLIFF AND ROCHESTER

It was blessed to be at work again and upon material that did not make too much demand upon a still exhausted creative instinct.

Since the deaths of Emily and Anne, Charlotte had not found courage to open their books and now the necessary re-readings brought her sisters back to her in close communion.

"Agnes Grey" seemed to speak as Anne herself in its pages of simple description and gentle pathos, but "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall" puzzled Charlotte anew. The book had a wild touch, it was bizarre, even thrilling, but it was wholly unlike Anne. Strange that she had persisted despite Emily's protests, and had written on, crucifying herself, pressing thorns into her own heart and betraying to the world that tormented, disease-stricken brother in whose glorious future the trio of sisters had once believed!

Charlotte's reluctant fingers turned the pages. Here was Huntington 'lunching on soda-water mingled with brandy,' and here Helen, his wife, striving to greet him cheerfully upon his return from some absence yet before an hour was out driven to a bitter cry:

"You have shamefully wronged yourself, body and soul!"

Branwell spoke in Arthur Huntington's reply: "I've lived more in these four months, Helen, than you have in the whole course of your existence, or will to the end of your days if they numbered a hundred years; so I expect to pay for it in some shape."

Another chapter showed her Huntington as an invalid nursed by his wife crying as Branwell had cried: "I am in Hell already! This cursed thirst is burning my heart to ashes."

Almost against her will Charlotte read on. Huntington lay on his death-bed in unspeakable agony and his wife found 'that to talk of the past was to torture him with vain remorse, to refer to the future was to increase his anguish; and yet to be silent was to leave him a prey to his own regrets and apprehensions. Often he dwelt with shuddering minuteness on the fate of his perishing clay—the slow, piecemeal dissolution already invading his frame; the shroud, the coffin, the dark, lonely grave and all the horror of corruption.' He clung to his wife afraid to relinquish her hand—so Anne had sat with Branwell's hand in hers while he shuddered in a paroxysm of terror.

Charlotte closed the book and thrust it aside. Never, by her will should it be given fresh life! With softened look she touched "Agnes Grey"—here was the real Anne—and Anne's poems, then smoothed out the crumpled sheets of that never-ending Gondal series Emily and Anne had begun in childhood, and one of the quinquennial 'life histories' the sisters had written and sealed for future reading; folded as small as a sixpence it had wedged in the back of Anne's desk.

Sitting on the floor beside the fire Charlotte looked

over, tore up and burnt sheet after sheet in Anne's neat writing, glad that eyes less loving than her own were not to see the pathetic records. How little Anne had asked of life; how little she had had!

The poems gave her pause. Many she had seen before; some were scraps too poignant or too unpolished for publication, but one held her.

I hoped that with the brave and strong
  My portioned task might lie.
To toil amid the busy throng
  With purpose pure and high.

But God had fixed another part,
  And he has fixed it well
I said so with my bleeding heart
  When first the anguish fell.

. . . . . .

If Thou should'st bring me back to life,
  More humble I should be
More wise—more strengthened for the strife—
  More apt to lean on Thee.

Should Death be standing at the gate
  Thus would I keep my vow
But, Lord! whatever be my fate
  Oh, let me serve Thee now!

Charlotte kissed the sheet as she laid it aside. There lay Anne's last message to the world, and with it the world should read the lines Emily had written as Death approached. Anne had brought her the poem and the surviving sisters had read it together; now, sitting

alone in the firelight, Charlotte repeated the verses that had lived in her memory.

No coward soul is mine,
No trempler in the world's storm-troubled sphere:
I see Heaven's glories shine
And Faith shines equal arming me from fear . . .
. . . . . .
Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts; unutterably vain;
Worthless as withered weeds,
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main!
. . . . . .
Though earth and man were gone
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou wert left alone
Every existence would exist in Thee

There is not room for Death
Nor atom that his might could render void
Thou—THOU art Being and Breath
And what Thou art can never be destroyed. . . .

What strange daring thoughts had lain hidden behind Emily's inscrutable eyes. With gentle fingers Charlotte shut the worn little desk with their ink-stained velvet linings and opened "Wuthering Heights."

Since Emily's death Charlotte had never passed The Withens, lying hidden in a fold of the curlew-haunted hills, without thinking of the tragedy of Cathy and Heathcliff which Emily had woven around the site of the desolate farmhouse. Now as she read she wondered again how the sister who had seemed to know as little of life as a nun knows of those who passed her convent, should have written this book of all books.

Branwell as well as Emily spoke to her from the earlier pages, yet Branwell could never have known what his sisters were doing; when they three had begun to write their novels Branwell had lost his manhood. 'Too late' . . . bitter words. And because success had come too late for him to share Charlotte had never told him even of "Jane Eyre." Yet, reading alone in the firelight, Branwell's thoughts, Branwell's words, she remembered Anne's strange hints. No, no, impossible! Turning again to the book she forgot everything but Heathcliff, his passion, his savage cruelty; his knowledge of the moorlands.

It was strange to compare her own creation, Edward Rochester, with Heathcliff.

Sometimes in her solitude Charlotte spoke aloud; she did so now: 'Mr. Rochester is like wine of a good vintage, time mellows but does not sour him. . . . But Heathcliff? Perhaps, if the black gypsy cub had been carefully reared, he might have become a human being, but Emily chose to show the effect of continued injustice upon a naturally perverse, vindictive disposition; tyranny and injustice made him a demon. . . . And the worse of it is,' said Charlotte, 'that his spirit is breathed into the whole narrative. It haunts every moor and glen, it beckons from every fir tree in the heights.'

Strange, powerful book and yet it oppressed her. Every page seemed charged with a sort of moral electricity; never did it give unalloyed pleasure. Had Emily lived and written more she would have forced the world to recognize her genius. So Charlotte spoke sorrowing that her sister had died with all her music

in her; from her eyes was hidden the judgment of posterity.

In the following weeks she re-wrote, revised and re-arranged, living with the spirits of her sisters, her mind on the past even when she went stealing into the kitchen, when Tabitha was busy in the peat-room, eager to cut the eyes out of the potatoes without offending the purblind old woman.

Books came from Cornhill; she read them. Letters arrived; she answered them, but her thoughts were with Emily, Anne and the Branwell of her childhood. Mr. Nicholls, catching a glimpse of her as she flitted through the churchyard, likened her to a fluttering bird caught in a mesh.

Ellen Nussey snatched at an unexpected chance of driving to Haworth and tried to coax her friend to return with her to Brookroyd, but Charlotte answered that she had become accustomed to her portion of Solitude.

Breakdown was near by the time her task was accomplished and the books with their biographical preface were in the printer's hands. She held out till they were published and then accepted a Heaven-directed invitation from Miss Martineau. Ellen Nussey could not meet her need.

Chapter XXVII

VISITING MISS MARTINEAU

A WHITE world sparkled outside, and there is no beauty surpassing that of Lakeland in winter; an icy wind swept across the frozen waters, but the library at The Knoll was warm and very peaceful. Charlotte knitted contentedly while Harriet Martineau talked lying stretched on her *chaise longue.*

Now and then the ear-trumpet would be raised and inclined towards the guest, but if the gesture did not attract speech the even flow of conversation continued; now the hostess talked of books and people, now of the home she had built in which every article of furniture seemed to have been the gift of some great man.

"And," said Miss Martineau contentedly, "my garden is the same. The very sods for my lawn were discovered waiting to be laid one morning purporting to be the gift of some poachers who had appreciated my Game Law Tales—but I ha' ma' doobts!—and the trees! Macready planted the oaks for me—and Wordsworth the stone pines at the foot of the terrace. He suggested the motto for my sundial, too, 'Light come visit me.' There was a period in my youth when I worshipped his work and recited him by the hour, indeed, I kept his portrait pinned up in my bedroom," she added with a laugh. "Did you ever meet him?"

"No," said Charlotte, debating whether she should

mention the youthful letters that had been sent forth to Wordsworth from Haworth Parsonage.

"A curious man," said Harriet Martineau, dipping her ear-trumpet towards Charlotte. "What?—Pity you did not come a few months earlier, I would have taken you to Rydal Mount, it's too late now . . . But about the trees. After he had planted them Wordsworth washed his hands in the watering-can and then warned me that as mistress of The Knoll, I was bound to have many callers. 'Do as my sister and I did at Grasmere,' he urged, 'or you will be eaten out of house and home. Welcome them, and of your hospitality give them a cup of tea, but if they wish for meat, say "Certainly, my friends, but you must pay for your board."' " She laughed the jovial laugh that Charlotte liked to hear, and once more the ear-trumpet dipped invitingly towards her.

"Did you know Coleridge too?" she asked.

"Poor Hartley," answered Miss Martineau, "I can tell you little of him from my own knowledge. Except for meeting him on the road I did not know him. To tell the truth I recoiled from his acquaintance seeing how burdensome it was to persons less busy than myself. He was—drunk—the five times I was thrust into his company, and I should think there are few solitary ladies who would have encouraged intercourse with him after *that,*" added Miss Martineau, "but I went to his funeral and saw Wordsworth stooping over the grave." She fell silent remembering the poet's cry for his lost friends:

By thy cross and passion good Lord deliver me!

Charlotte knitted on till the door opened and a visitor advanced; she recognized him as young Matthew Arnold. He stayed an hour and under the magic of Miss Martineau's influence talked his best, forgetting, perhaps, that Charlotte was 'past thirty and plain, though with expressive eyes'; she found that he *did* 'improve upon further acquaintance.' The mannerisms which had annoyed her on their first encounter at Fox How dropped away, and she realized something of his intellectual worth meeting him half-way when he turned to talk to her—of curates and schools and Brussels.

Three years later he sent her a book of poems; five years later he wrote "Haworth Churchyard" and told of the meeting of the two gifted women with whom he now sat drinking tea while gently laughing at Miss Martineau's enthusiasm for her toy farm:

> . . . the one
> Brilliant with recent renown,
> Young, unpractised, had told
> With a master's accent her feign'd
> Story of passionate life;
> The other, maturer in fame
> Earning, she too her praise
> First in fiction, had since
> Widen'd her sweep, and surveyed
> History, politics, mind . . .

The story went on:

> Where behind Keighley, the road
> Up to the heart of the moors
> Between heather-clad, showery hills
> . . . . . .

There on its slope is built
The moorland town. But the church
Stands on the crest of the hill,
Lonely and bleak: at its side
The parsonage house and the graves.

Round thee they lie. The grass
Blows from their graves to thine own
She, whose genius though not
Puissant like thine, was yet
Sweet and graceful;—and she
(How shall I sing her?) whose
Soul knew no fellow for might
Passion, vehemence, grief,
Daring—since Byron died
That world-famed son of fire. She, who sank
Baffled, unknown, self-consumed:
Whose too bold dying song
Stirred like a clarion blast my soul!

Of one, too, I have heard,
A brother—sleeps he here?
Of all that gifted race
Not the least gifted.

. . . . . .

But some dark shadow came. . . .

If Charlotte could have known she would have knelt at Matthew Arnold's feet and blessed him. Now she acquiesced rather hesitatingly when Miss Martineau accepted an invitation for the morrow.

* * *

Lying in her room among the gables Charlotte heard her tireless hostess leave the library after midnight and

stir again before dawn. When she expressed contrition, believing that Miss Martineau was making up time lost in entertaining her, the latter laughed.

"I always work late and begin early, my dear Miss Brontë. A cold bath and a brisk walk make a good beginning for my sedentary days; I like to be at my desk by seven a.m."

"I could not emulate you if I disciplined my nature for an age!" exclaimed Charlotte.

"My guests do as they will," answered Miss Martineau.

Pleasant days followed. When Miss Martineau left her desk, there were walks and talks and an interchange of views that was delightful, though Charlotte was amazed to find that Miss Martineau had been unable to read "Vanity Fair" from the 'moral disgust it had occasioned,' and shook her head over the life its author was leading: "Mr. Thackeray has said more, and more effectively, about snobs and snobism than any other man, and yet his frittered life, and his obedience to the call of the great, are the observed of all beholders. As it is, so must it be—but Oh, the pity of it!"

They agreed better on the subject of the Duke of Wellington and when Miss Martineau read aloud the first page or so of her chapter on the Peninsular War Charlotte's enthusiasm amazed the other as much as Miss Martineau's strictures on Thackeray's work had bewildered Charlotte.

"Oh, thank you for your justice to this man!" she cried with brimming eyes.

'Humph. A touch of idolatry, wise to change the subject,' thought Miss Martineau who had previously

come to the conclusion that her guest had morbid tendencies.

Like Charlotte, Miss Martineau had looked forward to a career as a governess, but the way was barred by deafness. Then, as Charlotte and her sisters had planned a school, so Miss Martineau, in advance of her age, had drawn up a scheme for Correspondence Classes but had found no students. Charlotte listened eagerly when her new friend spoke of her struggles. At one time she had been engaged to be married but the man became insane. "Since then," said Miss Martineau with staggering frankness, "my mind has been healthily free from love affairs, and as for my deafness I have arrived at the stage when I can accept it as the best thing that could have happened to me—the best in a selfish view as the grandest impulse to self-mastery—and the best in a higher view as my most peculiar opportunity for helping others."

To be with such a woman was a tonic. Charlotte decided that Miss Martineau's cheerful brown face was pleasanter to look upon than that of many a beauty. Exhaustless in strength and spirits, indefatigable in her capacity for labour, a great and good woman—though not, of course, without peculiarities. For once Charlotte was prepared to stay longer than had been originally planned, but at the threatened advent of other visitors she fled.

"Come again," said Miss Martineau, "and next time let it be in the spring. My idea of Heaven is a place gay with yellow lilies and lilac crocuses—yes, let it be spring. Meanwhile, when things go awry," she added kindly as she put Charlotte into the carriage, "remem-

ber some of the maxims I used to collect as a child, 'Never ky for twifles' was a favourite—very useful my dear Miss Brontē!"

'Fallible on some points of judgment,' decided Charlotte, pursuing her ruthless analysis and remembering Miss Martineau's dissertation on "Vanity Fair" and a few over-personal comments on herself, 'blunt on some points of feeling—but of such wonderful endowments that she has my sincerest esteem!'

On the whole it was a more favourable summary than was customary.

Chapter XXVIII

MR. TAYLOR COMES TO HAWORTH

Charlotte broke her journey by spending a few days with Ellen Nussey (who had been commissioned by Mary Taylor to discover if there were any grounds for a rumour that had reached her in New Zealand to the effect that Charlotte Brontë had been jilted either by *one* curate or *three*) and arrived home to find a precious packet of books awaiting her. Mr. Smith had sent the newly published "Stones of Venice"—Charlotte decided that Mr. Ruskin was one of the few *writers* as distinguished from *book-makers* of the age—and Mrs. Gaskell an offering of "Moorland Cottage."

"It is as pure and fresh as the unopened morning daisy," said Charlotte, "and the end is like a balsam herb with healing in its leaves."

Mr. Brontë listened impatiently to such rhapsodies; his daughter had played long enough.

"You should be writing again, Charlotte," he told her while his thin knuckles beat a tattoo on the table, and she felt it as an unwarrantable intrusion upon her mind's privacy.

"Since I have published 'Shirley' I have not accumulated what makes it needful for me to speak again.

Till I do, God give me grace to be dumb!" said Charlotte with unexpected vehemence.

"It is essential that your name should be kept before the public," argued her father. "Something further is expected from the author of 'Jane Eyre' and 'Shirley.'"

"My friends advise me to take my own time," she answered, remembering the advice offered by Sydney Dobell.

"Charlotte, there is the question of money."

"I would rather hire myself out again as a governess than write out of mood!" she answered quickly.

"Money," said Mr. Brontë knitting his bushy eyebrows.

"Mr. Smith has paid me five hundred pounds for each of my books and he will pay as much—perhaps more for the next when it comes; you must allow me my bad days, Papa."

Mr. Brontë left the room in silent displeasure and Charlotte sat down to answer Mr. Smith's letter. Her new book would come to maturity in time, as the grass grew and the corn ripened, she could not be forced as if she were a book-maker rather than a writer. So she could argue, but conscience troubled her. Perhaps if she shut herself away from every enjoyment her mind would arouse itself once more? And now Mr. Smith suggested another London visit! He must be told that her deserts were solitary confinement and a diet of bread and water and never another communication from Cornhill till something was achieved; the result of twelve months of such treatment would be either that she emerged at the end of the period with a three-volume MSS. in her hand, or in such a condi-

tion of intellect as to be for ever exempt from literary effort! So much for Mr. George Smith, but thinking of his requirements reminded Charlotte of the manuscript she had pushed down behind the row of books a year or so before. How in her maturity would she view "The Professor"? She fished the packet out and began to read.

Surely there were passages in it equal to the best she had written? The school chapters were good—oh those phlegmatic Belgians with blood too gluey to boil with rage no matter what happened! It might be possible to alter—to introduce new characters; she had gained in experience. She thrust the MSS. back, but the germ of "Villette" crept into her mind as she walked up and down the low room followed by the ghosts of her sisters.

A new friendship began as the new book grew. Charlotte had sent a copy of the biographical edition of "Wuthering Heights" to the writer of the "Palladium" review thanking him for the 'noble justice' he had rendered to Emily, which, she explained, had 'awakened a tenderer sentiment of thankfulness' than any eulogies heaped upon her own head: 'My sister cannot thank you herself,' wrote Charlotte, 'she is gone out of your sphere and mine. Human blame and praise are nothing to her now, but it revived me for many a day to find that, dead as she is, the work of her genius has at last met with worthy appreciation.'

Sydney Dobell had replied offering Charlotte his friendship; he had 'long been a brother to her in his thoughts.'

This was going both far and fast. Charlotte felt

bound to point out that she was a 'plain country-clergyman's daughter' and no longer 'young' any more except by courtesy. Sydney Dobell must be many years her junior since he viewed life from a standpoint she had long passed: 'I,' she wrote, 'am a journeyer at noontide . . . you think chiefly of what is to be done and won in life, I, of what is to be suffered. . . .'

But Sydney Dobell replied that the author of "Jane Eyre" must be for ever young. Then, driven to admit that his years were only twenty-seven he explained that he had small faith in arithmetic and by his own standards felt that he could make his correspondent look upon him as a very old man.

Charlotte offered the relationship of 'a grave elder sister'—and Sydney Dobell suggested a journey to Switzerland on a 'fifty-fifty basis'—always escorted by his wife.

But such excursions were not for Charlotte Brontë; it was enough to hint that she might meet her correspondent in London.

Her thoughts were turned in another direction by the publication of Miss Martineau's "Letters on Man's Nature and Development." This was the first unequivocal declaration of disbelief in God and a future life that Charlotte had read and it was emphasized for her by the fact that the book must have been compiled, or at least revised, while she was under Miss Martineau's roof.

'If this be Truth, well may she guard herself with mystery and a veil!' cried Charlotte, feeling that the publication of such a work had given a death-blow to her friend's usefulness in the world. Who would trust

the word of, or rely upon the judgment of, an avowed atheist? She read on, for the book had an awesome fascination, but her sense of horror deepened.

Oddly enough, a copy of the detestable compilation fell into the hands of good Miss Wooler whose grey curls bobbed as she read it. Her first thought was of the moral danger encircling her erstwhile pupil, who, if she were Currer Bell to others, remained, to Miss Wooler, the shy shrinking little girl who had come to her years before in a rusty green frock. Charlotte must not risk contamination; Charlotte must renounce her dangerous friend. But Charlotte was no coward.

"It grieves me to neglect or oppose your advice, Miss Wooler," she answered gravely, "but there is in Miss Martineau's nature much that is noble."

"Such attributes are not shown in this book," protested the schoolmistress who read her Bible through methodically every year, and Charlotte was forced to agree, still, when 'hundreds' were doubtless forsaking Miss Martineau—"more I fear in the apprehension that their fair names may suffer if seen in connection with hers than from any pure convictions such as *you* suggest, Miss Wooler," Charlotte could not bear to rank as a fair-weather friend. "As for her sin—is it not one of those which God, not man, must judge?"

Miss Wooler was shaken and Charlotte pressed her advantage. "If you were in my place, Miss Wooler, and knew Miss Martineau as well as I do; if you had shared with me the proofs of her rough but genuine kindliness, and had seen how she secretly suffers from abandonment, you would be the last to give her up. You, I am sure, would separate the sinner from the

sin, and feel as if the right lay rather in quietly adhering to her in her strait (at least while that adherence is unfashionable and unpopular)—than on turning your back on her when the world set the example." It might be that if she, Charlotte Brontë, showed this friend patience and tolerance in her hour of need Miss Martineau would ask her heart whether the course she had been pursuing might not possibly be faulty. Thackeray's summary of Charlotte Brontë's character had been very near the truth.

All good Miss Wooler could extract from her was a promise to consider the subject seriously: at Ambleside, all unconscious of worldly censure and Charlotte's loyal courage, Miss Martineau sat amid laudatory reviews and eager friendly letters.

Perhaps Miss Wooler's interposition had its effect, for on re-reading the dangerous book Charlotte was shaken by a realization of her own ignorance and cast about for someone of unbiased judgment who would read and discuss it with her. Mr. Smith? No, he was too young. Mr. Williams? Again no; he was the orthodox father of a family. . . . Mr. Taylor, sound of kernal if with an outer husk?—Firm principled, right-minded, reliable, a man she had learnt to appreciate? . . . Yes, the devastating production might pass into his hands in safety. With a sigh of relief Charlotte tied up and despatched the packet, then waited anxiously for Mr. Taylor's verdict. When it came it pleased her so highly that she copied out a few consolatory sentences, and forwarded them to the much mystified Miss Martineau, 'hoping they would cheer her.'

Less satisfying than Mr. Taylor's criticism was a

disturbing hint that, as he was shortly departing to India on the firm's business he might appear at Haworth to pay a farewell visit since he would be abroad for five years.

Charlotte had long ago given up curls and now wore her hair smoothly parted, but Ellen Nussey still retained these embellishments and when last at Brookroyd Charlotte had sat with her friend at curling-time talking with the abandonment engendered by absence of hairpins. Jealousy had bred suspicion in Ellen's heart and she imagined Charlotte beset by suitors who would reft her from Yorkshire: Mr. Taylor had been among the band.

Charlotte had pooh-poohed the notion although it flattered her, but now she was driven to think that Ellen had shown unusual acumen. After all, for what other reason should Mr. Taylor make the unnecessary journey from London to Yorkshire? If he came—*if* he asked her hand—what answer should she give? In her trepidation she sounded Mr. Brontë who, usually prone to utter threats of giving up his parsonage and 'going into lodgings' should his daughter desert him, seemed to contemplate that daughter's hypothetical marriage with a member of the firm of Smith and Elder (who was venturing his life by going to India and would certainly not suggest taking a bride upon so hazardous a journey) with considerable calmness.

Charlotte remained doubtful. She liked Mr. Taylor as a friend, she esteemed him and was grateful for his many kindnesses, but it was difficult to contemplate him as a prospective husband either now or

five years hence; which five years would be for him, active, and for her, passive. Yet life as it stretched before her into a lonely old age frightened her, and her father's fragility seemed more evident week by week.

Mr. Taylor arrived early in April when even Haworth Parsonage had lost its usual grimness. Mr. Brontë received his daughter's guest urbanely, then came Charlotte, April inclining her to softness, but at the first glance from Mr. Taylor's keen eyes she recoiled. Thinner, older, harder than she remembered him, and even more fiery of hair, he reminded her of Branwell. When he took her hand she felt herself grow rigid.

He was nervous; she, apprehensive.

Sterling qualities he might have, cleverness too; *but he was second rate!* Marriage with him would bring pain and humiliation in its train; better remain single for ever; better face loneliness and desolation to the end of time rather than this. So raged Charlotte's confused thoughts while Mr. Taylor talked, till at last, still shaking, she found herself alone.

Had he proposed? She was not quite sure, but there was nothing to tell Ellen and she felt strangely middle-aged!

Mr. Brontë was seeing his guest to the gate and exhorting him to be true to himself, his country and his God. When he re-entered he came holding Mr. Taylor's farewell gift of a book and peered at his daughter over the spectacles which seemed to balance on his stock.

"A fine character, Charlotte. A fine character without doubt."

"But without breeding, Papa!"

"Hoity-toity!" said Mr. Brontë who detested anything in the way of contradiction, and retired to his own domain. That evening after prayers he turned to a chapter in Jeremiah and read majestically:

'Give heed to me, O Lord, and hearken not to the voice of them that contend with me.'

It seemed hardly fair.

Chapter XXIX

"CURRER BELL! . . . CURRER BELL!"

"Villette" took shape slowly, and depression seized Charlotte; then Mr. Brontë fell ill and by the time he recovered her resolution to remain at home until she had accomplished something began to waver. She let herself play with the idea of another visit to London, although guiltily aware that she had not even finished embroidering the cushion cover she had intended to present to Mrs. Smith a year before.

Mr. Smith wrote suggesting a trip down the Rhine, but Fortitude bade Charlotte answer that only drones willingly ate honey they had not hived, and she resolved to hold out a little longer. Then Ellen went to Leeds and it seemed a Heaven-sent opportunity to order some chemisettes 'of simple style for every day and good quality for best,' and likewise a lace mantle provided such garments were reasonable in price and could be sent on approval. They came, but somehow black lace over black satin had a rusty effect and Charlotte boldly determined to wear a white lace mantle which was pretty, neat and light, and cost only thirty-four shillings.

Ellen might call it 'trumpery,' but Charlotte considered that there was no shame to a person of her means in wearing a cheaper garment. More sure of her own taste than usual she went twenty miles to buy a bonnet which, when she brought it home and

tried it on again in her sombre surroundings, alarmed her with the gaiety of its pink lining. .

Tabitha and Martha watched the unpacking of these lavish purchases. What could such outlay mean except matrimony? Mr. Brontë, too, was perturbed and reiterated his familiar threat of 'going into lodgings.'

"I am merely visiting London again, Papa," Charlotte assured him.

She stitched and stitched. Was she glad to contemplate another holiday? She scarcely knew. Long ago as a small child she had been lectured on the duty of being glad 'in fear and moderation.' She remembered it now and told herself to stint enthusiasm and be penurious with joy.

She went in May, hastening her departure in order to be present at Thackeray's series of lectures on the English Humorists—but Mr. Taylor had sailed before she arrived; perhaps it was as well for someone mentioned in her hearing that that gentleman's temper was 'unfortunately irritable.'

The lectures created a furore. Thackeray had hesitated to embark upon them despite a score of tempting offers feeling that he was turning himself into a mountebank and that Carlyle would never have consented to make such a mortifying exhibition of himself, but there seemed no other way of securing his daughter's future.

Conscious of his feeling friends rallied to his support and the audiences proved as brilliant as the lectures. Macaulay never missed one of the series while the Carlyles, the Brookfields, Landseer, Kinglake and Miss Martineau became familiar figures in the salon.

Charlotte Brontë arrived in time for the second lecture and Thackeray, who had been incredibly nervous on the first night, was now equal to hovering about beforehand and greeting his friends. He saw 'the little Jeanne d'Arc' enter, bore down upon her and carried her off to present to 'the young-looking old lady' he called his mother. Charlotte examined her with interest knowing that she was the original of Helen Pendennis, but was glad to slip away to a less prominent position.

Thackeray's greeting had caused her to be noted, however, and many asked the name of the quaint little figure in the white lace mantle. 'Currer Bell' was whispered from row to row and presently one or two people came to present themselves on various pretexts.

Knowing their guest's overwhelming shyness the Smiths were alarmed, but when Thackeray began to speak Charlotte forgot herself and hung on his words, filled with admiration for the 'gentlemanlike ease' with which he spoke. Applause was a glorious incentive to Thackeray and he talked as naturally as to a group of friends at his own fireside. 'No wonder duchesses, countesses and the highest in the land throng to hear him,' thought Charlotte, glancing at the illustrious audience as the lecture drew to a close. Then to her dismay she found Thackeray at her side naïvely asking her opinion of his performance.

She had plenty of praise in her heart but was too shocked at his unnatural naturalness to be able to satisfy him, and murmuring something inadequate drew aside, thankful when others, more ready-tongued than herself, pressed forward with congratulations.

If not the lion of the occasion 'Currer Bell,' too,

had her fame and as her party moved towards the exit the audience separated, leaving an avenue down which she had to pass.

"Currer Bell!" . . . "Currer Bell!" . . . "Where?" —"Oh, let me see her."

Charlotte caught the whispered sentences passed from one to another as shrinking, trembling, now flushed, now white, clinging to a friendly arm, she made her way to the carriage. The ordeal sent her home with a racking headache and only her admiration for the author of "Vanity Fair" nerved her to venture further appearances at his lectures. In the interludes between these she went to the newly erected Crystal Palace, 'an exhausting, bustling place with an appeal to the eye rather than to the heart or mind,' saw Rachael act, a performance which made her 'shudder to the very marrow,' and heard the great Protestant preacher D'Aubigné; it was bitter-sweet to listen to the French language once again.

So far as possible the Smiths shielded their guest from too much excitement for London air oppressed her and headaches were frequent; she was angry that her weakly frame would not permit her to enjoy the fruit of her own success. Condemned to solitude for eleven months in the year she had so wanted to be radiant these brief four weeks!

A little envious, perhaps, she watched Thackeray when he appeared in Gloucester Place apparently quite forgetful of the wigging she had administered on her previous visit. Mr. Smith might laugh when the great man described himself as 'reeling from dinner party to dinner party, wallowing in turtle soup, swimming in

claret and champagne,' but not so Charlotte Brontë. And when he turned to assure her of the welcome awaiting her among the great ladies of the land who were eager to open their houses to her, she answered that she preferred to remain obscure.

It was the night of Queen Victoria's famous fancy-dress ball and the Duchess of Norfolk, the Marchioness of Londonderry and the Ladies Chesterfield and Clanricarde had bidden Thackeray attend their earlier gatherings. Charlotte watched his departure. No, she did not consider that society had produced so good an effect upon him as to persuade her to try the same experiment! In fact she was very doubtful if she would care to live in London at all; should she do so she would most certainly 'eschew the literary coteries.' *She* had no wish to become the 'pet' of great ladies.

In cynical mood she allowed herself to be escorted to the Spanish Chapel where Cardinal Wiseman was holding a confirmation, and found the gorgeous scene 'impiously theatrical.' Her severity increased when she attended a meeting at which the good Cardinal spoke on the necessity of securing converts for Catholicism, and her ultra-Protestantism bristled as she noted the enthusiasm of those to whom he spoke.

No, London was *not* agreeing with Charlotte; she began to wonder whether Tabitha and Martha had finished spring-cleaning the parsonage.

One morning young Mr. Smith carried her off to a phrenologist where as 'Mr. and Miss Fraser,' they submitted their skulls to his manipulating fingers. Charlotte's brain was described as 'large' and her temperament as 'nervous.' In domestic relations she was

warm and affectionate, being capable of forming strong and enduring attachments; her sense of duty was keen, but she lacked self-discipline. Sensitive, critical, speculative and circumspect 'Miss Fraser' would seldom meet with persons whose standard of excellence approached that with which she could entirely sympathize! It was a delicate way of saying that Charlotte was often over-ruthless in her judgments.

Mr. Smith's head was easier to read. As she listened Charlotte felt that she would carry away with her a true portrait of her friend and publisher. He *was* 'very sensitive,' clung to high standards and lived 'without arrogance.' An interesting morning and one that did not over-tire her, which was well, for on the morrow she was to attend one of the famous breakfasts given by Rogers the patriarch poet. She looked forward to a 'calm, refined, intellectual treat.'

Chapter XXX

'A CALM, REFINED, INTELLECTUAL TREAT'

When the breakfast invitation had first arrived Charlotte had spoken of refusal and only the chagrin of her hosts made her aware of the extent of her *faux pas*.

"You really *should* go," urged Mrs. Smith. "Indeed, Miss Brontë, an invitation to one of Mr. Samuel Rogers's breakfasts is a formal introduction to literary society. By the way, you know he refused the Laureateship on account of his great age?—and so it went to Mr. Alfred Tennyson."

"I feel sure you would enjoy it," added Mr. Smith, scarcely less disturbed than his mother; and Charlotte had let herself be persuaded.

It was arranged that she should go chaperoned by Mrs. Davenport who was a friend of the Kay-Shuttleworths; as the pair drove to 22 St. James's Place, Charlotte noted that the lady was beautiful and hoped that she was kind.

The party was a small one and Rogers, bearing the weight of his eighty-eight years gallantly, sat in his chair ready to receive the guest of honour. His shrewd old eyes looked through Charlotte as he strove to make her talk. Catching the quizzical twist of his mouth she remembered that he was said to possess the bitterest tongue, albeit the kindest heart, in London, and

guessed that only politeness restrained him from quoting one of his own poems:

> Alas to our discomfort, and his own,
> Oft are the greatest talents found
> In a fool's keeping. . . .

Then a miracle happened: someone asked a question about the Duke of Wellington and Charlotte forgot herself.

"You knew him, sir?"

"I knew him well, madam. He came here often—once when the mob had hooted him crying 'Buonaparte for ever!' He said that it had taken him forty minutes to ride from Lincoln's Inn. Two old Chelsea Pensioners contrived to reach his side and cried that they had served under him for many a day—'Keep close to me now,' says the Duke, and, begad, they did," continued Rogers, warming to his favourite anecdote. "Each man stood with his back against the flank of the horse while the mob howled. A curious day to choose for a hostile demonstration against Wellington—it was the 18th of June."

"And did he speak to you of Waterloo?" asked Charlotte, her eyes alight with interest.

"He said that it was a battle of giants—of giants," repeated Samuel Rogers, "and that such armies as those at Waterloo have seldom met. Many of our troops were new—the Duke found that, although the new manœuvre ill they fight well, better perhaps than those who have fought and bled. His grace was never tired of praising the courage of our ensigns and lieu-

tenants, boys straight from school, begad. 'They ran as at cricket!' "

"A great victory!" said Charlotte emotionally.

"A great victory," repeated Mr. Rogers, "but, as Wellington said, such a victory is the greatest tragedy in the world, except defeat."

There was no need to ask further questions, for the poet had found his subject. He told of Wellington's pride in his horse Copenhagen, unfed all day, except perhaps for a mouthful of standing corn while his master was in the saddle, yet able to kick up his heels at the end of the battle though ridden from four in the morning till midnight. He told her, too, of how the news of the victory had been carried to Louis XVIII in Ghent, reaching him as he sat at breakfast in the bow-window of his dining-room beneath the gaze of admiring citizens. A Rothschild agent standing in the crowd, saw the messenger admitted, noted the extravagant demonstrations of joy in the royal household, drew the correct conclusion, took horse, and made for the nearest port in a dash for England. "Not until the banker had taken his seat on the Stock Exchange was news of that great victory allowed to reach the Prime Minister," concluded Mr. Rogers.

Charlotte could not be called plain now. "And to think that he never saw his enemy," she said with bated breath.

"No, he never saw Buonaparte," corroborated the poet, "but at Waterloo they were within half a mile of one another. 'As clever a fellow as ever lived,' the Duke used to say, 'although he lacked common sense on some occasions.' "

Changing the subject Rogers began to show his treasures and each brought forth an anecdote: Here was a Joshua Reynolds—"I paid fifty pounds for it and my man carried it home before me, people recognized it for what it was and pressed to see. . . . Strange fellow Reynolds, once gave his model a bad shilling—I saw the girl sitting on his steps crying because he would not change it for a good one. . . . Not like Turner, I have a portfolio of his sketches here. He asked fifty pounds for each of the illustrations of my 'Italy,' but when we found there had been a miscalculation as to costs he offered to take them back or let me use them at five pounds each." . . .

"Has this a history?" asked Mrs. Davenport, lifting an inkstand, and Rogers laughed well pleased.

"Moore's, madam. He gave it me for my good services. D'ye remember Jeffrey's review of his poems in the 'Edinburgh'? It angered him—and he came to me to borrow pistols."

The talk drifted to literary men and Charlotte listened spellbound. Rogers spoke of Wordsworth's infinite capacity for continued conversation; of Byron's idiosyncrasies and the general surprise when "Childe Harold" proved a success. But Charlotte considered Byron a somewhat dangerous subject; seeking safer topics she spoke of Sir Walter Scott and found herself at one with Rogers in his admiration of the man.

He told her how when he had last seen Scott, ill, weak, and being carried abroad in search of health, Sir Walter had spoken to him with regret of a trick he had played on a former schoolmate, a boy always at the top of his class and whom Scott had been un-

able to oust from his proud place till he had contrived to cut off a particular button on that boy's waistcoat, a button with which the youth was accustomed to fumble when answering difficult questions.

The button gone Scott rose to the top—and stayed there. The other boy sank lower, and finally came to fill some minor post in the Courts of Law at Edinburgh. Guilty in conscience Scott had meant to lend him a helping hand 'some day,' and now it was too late!

In a rare pause someone displayed interest in Charlotte's concerns and was briefly told that she had finished nothing since "Shirley."

The old poet smiled in approbation. He did not approve of hasty work and believed that the mind should be allowed to lie fallow. "I was engaged on 'The Pleasures of Memory' for nine years," he told the company, "and to 'Italy' I gave almost twice that length of time. Never write and never publish without full consideration, madam," he added, turning directly to Charlotte.

Suddenly Rogers began to recite from his own "Reflections":

> Man to the last is but a forward child,
> So eager for the future, come what may.
> And to the present so insensible!
> Oh, if he could in all things as he would
> Years would as days, and hours as moments be:
> He would, so restless is his spirit here,
> Give wings to Time and wish his life away!

Vivacity left him, he dropped back into his chair an old man and very tired. It was time for the guests to go.

Mrs. Davenport collected her charge and they drove to Gloucester Place.

A 'calm, intellectual treat?' Oh yes, and now that it was over Charlotte was glad that she had let herself be persuaded to attend the breakfast.

Her head ached, perhaps she would go and lie down.

Chapter XXXI

MR. NICHOLLS COMES TO TEA

Charlotte had been a month away from home, but two visits yet remained to be paid. She had accepted Mrs. Gaskell's long-standing invitation and was to spend a day or so with Ellen Nussey who was inclined to think that her friend was neglecting her for the great world.

The journey from London to Manchester proved hot and dusty, but Mrs. Gaskell's home in Plymouth Grove was as delightful as its mistress. Alone in the quiet bedroom, pervaded by the perfume of flowers and the sound of whispering leaves, Charlotte almost forgot that she was beneath the roof of a Dissenter; she was tired out, as Mrs. Gaskell quickly realized, and only asked to be let alone. Plans for entertainment went by the board, the guest was put into a comfortable chair near an open window—and found happiness. She watched the family life going on around her and marvelled: Mr. Gaskell 'good and kind,' Mrs. Gaskell 'kind, clever, animated and unaffected,' both busy with public affairs as well as private; visitors dropping in, children demanding love and attention, maids coming for orders. And yet amid it all, the centre of the family and with a thousand calls upon her time, Mrs. Gaskell could write. "Cranford" had appeared the previous year and "Ruth" was in the author's mind. She

Amid it all, the centre of the family and with a thousand calls upon her time, Mrs. Gaskell could write.

sketched the plot and Charlotte listened eagerly. It had 'noble' promise and such a book might well be useful in restoring hope and energy to those who feared that they had forfeited their right to both. But Charlotte protested against the tragic end arguing that 'Ruth' need not die. "Why are we to shut the book weeping?" she asked. "And yet, I know—I understand. You must follow your own impulse, your own inspiration. In writing one must be free."

The creative instinct was stirring in her anew, but she did not talk of "Villette," although she confided to Mrs. Gaskell her unhappiness at the accusations of 'coarseness' that had been levelled against her work.

"I hope God will take from me whatever power of invention and expression I may have before He lets me become blind to the sense of what is fitting or unfitting to be said!" she explained, and changed the subject as Mrs. Gaskell's sunny-natured little daughters ran into the room; never before had Charlotte been attracted by children.

When she left Manchester it was with a willing promise to 'come again'—and would Mrs. Gaskell come to her at Haworth?

"But when you do," Charlotte added warningly, "prepare to leave civilization behind. With me you will find barbarism—loneliness and liberty; the change may do you good if it is not too prolonged."

Mrs. Gaskell conjured up a vision of the parsonage as it had been described to her by Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, a grey building unpainted for thirty years standing bleak and bare among the tombstones; inside, the

erratic father, and, for Charlotte, the haunting memories of her dead. Looking at her pale little guest Mrs. Gaskell marvelled, not that she was sometimes bitter, but rather that she should have kept heart and power alive in her desolation. After Charlotte's departure she re-read the book of poems that had been the sisters' first literary venture. What self-betrayal in the lines when one knew the life the trio had lived!

Mr. Brontë had missed his daughter and the visit to Ellen had to be curtailed. To Charlotte's surprise her father wished to hear a verbal account of her London experiences. Had she been entertained as she should have been? Were all doors opened wide to Currer Bell?

"Everyone was truly courteous and respectful," Charlotte told him and spoke of Mr. Rogers's breakfast, but what interested Mr. Brontë more were the facts that Sir David Brewster had escorted her to the Crystal Palace and that the Marquis of Westminster and the Earl of Ellesmere had sent her cards in order that she might view their pictures.

He rubbed his hands well pleased: "The Marquis of Westminster and the Earl of Ellesmere—yes, Charlotte, yes?"

"You will know, dear Papa," continued Charlotte as she poured out tea, "that I do not mention these things to boast of them but merely because I think they give you pleasure."

"Tut, tut," he answered impatiently. "Did you call upon Sir James and Lady Kay-Shuttleworth?"

"I did not intend to," said Charlotte austerely, "it seems waste of time to call upon people who cannot

possibly want to see one—besides, in my estimation, partaking of the error of obtrusiveness, but Sir James discovered that I was in town, so I was obliged to return his call—and then he asked me to stay with them."

"And why not?" asked Mr. Brontë.

"I had been away from home long enough, Papa, and London does not suit me." Mr. Brontë was annoyed, and racking her brains to find a subject that would please him Charlotte remembered Cardinal Wiseman who had impressed her as a big, portly man with not merely a double chin but a treble one. "He was dressed in black, Papa, just like a bishop or a dean, except that he wore scarlet gloves and a scarlet waistcoat, and he came simpering into the room like a fat old lady to sit down very demure in his chair. . . . The audience seemed to look upon him as a god."

"And he spoke, I suppose, like a canting Methodist," said Mr. Brontë violently, but ecclesiastics did not interest him as much as peers and he withdrew to his own room.

The summer was a pleasant one. Even the parsonage warmed a little and one day Charlotte noticed a bird singing on Anne's thornbush. Ellen came to stay and listen round-eyed to the story of her friend's adventures in London, before giving place to Miss Wooler whom time had improved; she seemed younger than in the Roe House days, thought Charlotte, forgetting the mysterious effect of added years upon herself —but the schoolmistress talked over-much of friendship and 'auld lang syne.'

One day Mr. Nicholls made a bold appearance to

ask for a cup of tea and mentioned that he was going to Ireland for his holiday. He showed himself kind, thoughtful and non-contentious. Yes, thought Charlotte, Ellen was right, she *had* done him less than justice in the past. . . .

From the outer world came news that Miss Martineau intended to write a novel and Charlotte shook her head doubting if the nature of her friend's genius would permit the production of first-rate fiction: Thackeray, too, was at work—Mr. Williams had heard that he was engaged upon an historical romance—Charlotte hoped that it would be a masterpiece. Mr. Smith made the horrifying suggestion that she should contribute a serial to "Cornhill," and Charlotte cried "NEVER!" She had a vivid realization of Thackeray's harassing method of writing while the printer's boy sat drumming his heels outside the door waiting for copy, and knew that her pen would be paralysed if any tale of hers began to appear before the last word was written.

Summer fled suddenly, and with the passing of fine weather Charlotte's headaches returned and sleepless nights troubled her once more with the usual result that depression overwhelmed her.

"What was there to hope for?" she asked herself as she watched the driving rain. 'But there, Hope was not a plant to flourish in Haworth soil though it might fling out a few leaves and a blossom now and then. It was Fortitude, not hope that thrived on the wind-swept moors.' She exercised her Fortitude when George Smith realized her unhappiness and suggested yet another London visit.

"No," said Charlotte firmly, "if there be no other objection (and there are many), there is the pain of saying 'good-bye.' I do not like it—I cannot bear it—and in any case going to London is mere palliative and stimulant on which re-action follows." No, she would remain at Haworth and she would work—but influenza attacked the household and put her good resolutions to naught. Then, came a letter from India. It surprised her, as she had taken Mr. Taylor's farewell promise to correspond merely as "a polite speech." The letter, too, was 'not ill-written' (although it contained paragraphs that were scarcely in good taste). What a conundrum the little man was! Should she answer or not? Charlotte pondered the question for days and finally wrote to ask Mr. Williams's advice. Perhaps she would know what to do when she received this respected friend's confidential opinion of his junior's character and disposition. The reply was satisfactory and Charlotte decided that faults of manner, even faults of temper, should weigh light in the balance against such excellence of principle as Mr. Williams reported; she would answer Mr. Taylor 'in a calm, civil manner.'

"Villette" was making slow progress, and sometimes, when imagination halted and Charlotte set forth to seek physical exhaustion in roaming Brow Moor or climbing Scartop, she thought of Miss Martineau and her steady resolution in work. *She* knew no Quaker-like waiting on the Spirit nor heavy interludes when power and will were at variance and her book had to be laid aside till a mood changed. Returning from such a walk Charlotte re-read what she had written and felt dissatisfied. Would "Villette" please Mr. Smith? How

would the critics view the production? But no, if once she allowed herself to think of *them* her hand would fall paralysed upon her desk. She must forget such men existed, do her best, then muffle her head and wait.

Chapter XXXII

'MON MAÎTRE!'

'Reason, coming stealing up to me through the twilight of that long, dim chamber, whispered stealthily' . . . wrote Charlotte '. . . I bent my head: I sat thinking an hour longer. Reason still whispered me laying on my shoulder a withered hand and frostily touching my ear with the chill blue lips of eld.' . . . She wrote on, forgetful of her present surroundings, back again in the refectory of the *pensionnat* in the Rue d'Isabelle. . . .

'The black stoves pleased me little when I first came, but now I begin to associate them with a sense of comfort, and presently I fell into a deep argument with myself on life and its chances; on Destiny and her decrees.' . . .

Charlotte dropped her pencil. Anger still smouldered against the woman whose suspicion had poisoned friendship and the embers flamed as she remembered how the other, suspecting treachery, had spied upon and misjudged her, spoiling, defaming that which she offered.

She had been suspected of manœuvring to obtain the flesh when what she asked was the response of the spirit.

"How dared she? . . . *How dared she?*" said Charlotte Brontë. Even now, despite the passage of years

and added worldly knowledge, she could see no justice in the other woman's outlook. And what had Monsieur Heger thought? Had he, too, taken her passionate craving for intellectual response and read physical desire into her unstudied words? Ah no, no! That way madness lay, and memory haunted nights. Slipping pencils and paper into her desk Charlotte went out to be buffeted back to sanity by the wind and the rain. Tabitha watched her go and shook her head; once there had been six of them to wander across the moors hand in hand.

The old woman waited and was ready with a hot drink and dry shoes and stockings when her mistress returned.

"Stay with me awhile, Tabby," said Charlotte as she took the cup and pulled forward the rocking-chair.

Hearing might be dim and Tabitha's eyes were failing, but her capacious pocket yielded up an assortment of socks that needed attention.

"Lunnon don't seem to suit ya, Miss Charlotte," she said as she fumbled for her wool, "nor tha' Manchester."

"It's not London nor Manchester either that's the trouble, but just *life,*" answered Charlotte.

"Aye, ya said naught," admitted Tabby, "but both Martha an' I thought ya' were going to ya' wedding—what with th' white lace cloak, th' silk dress and ya' new bonnet with its pink lining."

"I had some doubts of that bonnet myself at one time, Tabby," admitted Charlotte, "but amid all the splendours of London it did not look at all gay; indeed some people thought me *dowdy.*"

The remembrance of the triumphs that were no triumphs returned to her mind and she walked restlessly about the room. "I saw the Queen, Tabby, and the Duke of Wellington. . . . I love the old grey city of London, it is understandable and is getting its living while the 'west end' only enjoys itself. . . . There is *movement* in London, Tabby, and it's so quiet here. . . . Listen. . . . There is nothing, *nothing!* No sound except the ticking of the clock." She stood listening, but Tabby had spread out a sock on her hand and was looking at it with disfavour.

"Master must ha' a nail in his boot, Miss Charlotte."

"Oh, Tabitha . . . *Listen* to what I say."

"A nar-st hole," said Tabitha, rocking comfortably.

"I do not expect many people to take an interest in my fortunes, Tabitha, but surely *you* are proud of the fame I have won? I want Emily! . . . I want Anne!" she added drearily.

"A *bad* hole," said Tabitha as she selected a needle.

"Tabitha!" cried Charlotte, standing before her. "I heard Mr. William Makepeace Thackeray lecture in a great gilded salon with admiring duchesses and countesses sitting in rows before him, but he was *proud* to come and speak to me, Tabitha, and everybody wanted to see me."

"I'm not hearing a word," said the old woman as she rocked and darned. "Ya all mumble ya words these days."

It was Charlotte's turn not to hear, for she was far away in thought. "People whispered, Tabby, saying hateful things . . . *I* heard them . . . 'Thackeray's

mistress . . . a dismissed governess.' *I* saw them staring . . . *I* heard their whispers."

"Th' fire's getting low, Miss Charlotte," complained Tabitha, making an effort to rise but slipping stiffly back into her chair.

Charlotte swept up the hearth and poked the smouldering embers. "I don't understand society, Tabby," she went on. "It's a strange, complicated thing." Tabby was deaf, there was no need to conceal the bitterness of her social failure. "I was not a success, Tabby," she admitted miserably. "One young girl described me as 'entering in mittens, in silence and in seriousness.' I heard, although she did not mean that I should. . . . What was *wrong* with my mittens, Tabby? And can I help being serious?"

"I want ma' scissors, Miss Charlotte."

"Tabitha, Tabitha, do try to hear me!" cried Charlotte. "I could have gone anywhere, could have done anything, everyone wished to meet me. The critics came flocking—fine gentlemen some of them, infinitely more pompous than the authors. They thought me odd —provincial—rustic—for all their low bows. One whispered 'Is *that* the famous Currer Bell?'—another answered, 'Yes—*she looks tired with the weight of her own brains.*' And then Lewes came to me saying—'There should be a bond of union between us, Miss Brontë, since we have both written naughty books.' He said that to *me*, Tabitha, to *me*. . . . And I think the publication of a book is a solemn act of conscience."

"I canna' see to thread this needle, Miss Charlotte."

Charlotte took the needle and threaded it mechanically: "One night I left all the great ones, Tabby,

and went and talked to the governess . . . I understood what she was feeling sitting alone at the end of the long room beside a smoking lamp." . . .

"I feel the wind in ma' bones," complained Tabitha, "it's na s'warm here as by ma' own kitchen fire."

Charlotte went to the window. "Yes, it's blowing up a gale. Oh, peace, peace, Banshee keening at every crevice. It will shriek through the house to-night, Tabitha, but no need to trouble. Emily will not feel it, nor Anne. . . . Look at the moon, Tabitha. See how she reigns gloriously high as glad of the gale as if she gave herself to its fierce caresses with love."

"Come close up th' curtain, Miss Charlotte, and settle to ya' knitting," said Tabitha, preparing to leave the room.

"How lonely a house is when a clock tick-ticks in its half-inhabited, silent rooms," said Charlotte. "Tick . . . tick—and every second like the last. . . . Don't *go,* Tabitha—don't go!"

But Tabitha had gone and Charlotte was left to crouch by the fire. Voices whispered around her when she climbed the stairs to bed.

If only Monsieur Heger had been among the brilliant throng who had done her honour in London! He would have shared the fame his pupil had won. . . . What would he have said? . . . *'Tiens!* the English Mees—Mees Charlotte Brontë.' . . . He would have bowed low and taken her hand to kiss it and she could have told him of her pain. . . . Monsieur, I felt myself doubted—the insult still burns in my heart. . . . And now I am alone . . . my brother and sisters are dead. . . . There is no sunshine in the world for me

now, *mon maître*. . . . Monsieur, I wrote again and yet again. Was there no grief for me in your heart, Monsieur? . . . Believe me, not a draught from Sodom's lake could have been more bitter than your silence.'

'Mademoiselle, I suffer for you!' was that how he would have answered?

'I was a-hungered and you denied me crumbs,' she reminded him: she could hear his voice, now ironical, now kind. *'Dieu vous en garde, mon maître!'* . . .

And now he was leaving her . . . he was speaking to others. *What* was he saying with that shrug of the shoulders she remembered so well?

'Comme toujours un peu exalté!' . . .

'Mais oui, two brilliant English mees *certainement.* Both were my pupils but for a short time, you understand . . . Mees Charlotte returned alone. . . . She was *une originale,* that one, with the gift of expression *sans doute*. . . . We, Madame Heger and I, offered her a little post in order that she might find self-improvement—*si, si,* with a recompense of four hundred francs a year. Ah, it was an *erreur, une erreur de jugment,* you understand, but of the best will. It became *difficile, très difficile.* The little English Mees I like well . . . *mais que voulez-vous,* for me she has a regard too warm.' . . .

Ah no! He had not said he—he would not say it —and yet, had he?

"No, no, no!" she cried into the darkness.

Charlotte was cold, deadly cold. Nothing seemed to warm her; her head ached, her heart ached and the voices would not be silenced. She lay shivering till dawn and could not drag herself downstairs when

Martha carried breakfast into the dining-room. She was ill; next day she was worse. A doctor was fetched and Mr. Brontë took alarm. Martha suggested Ellen Nussey as a suitable nurse and Charlotte awoke one morning to find 'dear Nell' by her side ready to carry her off to Brookroyd so soon as she could be moved.

Some weeks elapsed before Mr. Nicholls's anxious inquiries could be answered satisfactorily. Then Ellen had her way.

Chapter XXXIII

MARY TAYLOR'S COMMENTS

It was pleasant to be in Ellen's home and pleasant too to read with her Mary Taylor's letters detailing her own adventures in shopkeeping and her amusement at seeing Charlotte's name in an English newspaper among the list of notables who had attended Thackeray's lectures —and yet friends reported that Charlotte was often in low spirits.

'Now why, in the prime of life, and in the flush of her hard-earned prosperity, is Charlotte not well and happy too?' asked the indignant Mary, and Charlotte felt there was justice in the query. She turned a page hastily and the friends laughed together over Mary's remarks on "Shirley." Did Charlotte realize that she was astray in the geography of the Red House? asked its erstwhile inhabitant. 'She has put the hand-some foreigner in the *servant's room!* But never for five years have I seen the matted hall and painted par-lour so plain. . . . My father does not like; he hates well enough and perhaps loves too, but he is not honest enough. It was he who taught me that I must never marry for money. . . . She has made us all talk as we would have talked if we had dared to speak—but she has made me a lump of perfection, concluded Mary, who had recognized herself as Rose Yorke.

Together, too, Charlotte and Ellen shared the books sent from Cornhill, among them the precious first volume of "Esmond" in manuscript. "A book to be read slowly, penuriously by daily allowance and made to last as long as possible," said Charlotte, but Ellen would not agree and they read on.

Undoubtedly "Esmond" showed traces of the author's wild, irregular life and yet how good it was—wise, truthful and sagacious despite its bitter satire and the relentless dissection of diseased subjects. Charlotte believed that the savage surgeon *liked* putting his knife into quivering flesh. He was unjust to women, as usual—it shocked her that he permitted Lady Castlewood to peep through a key-hole and be jealous of a boy and a milkmaid—but she felt that if there was anyone in the whole wide world for whom he cared who would tell him to continue with courage, "Esmond" might yet be the best book he had written. . . . But perhaps it should not be judged piecemeal.

"Whatever idle froth, whatever gall and vinegar a book of Mr. Thackeray's contains," she explained to Ellen, "there are no dregs. None of his readers need to rinse their mouths to take away the flavour of a degraded soul. He may be perverse, indeed he often is, but *never* degraded." Ellen listened as earnestly as she had listened in the days of their girlhood when Charlotte had advised her as to a course of reading.

"Esmond" was returned and in its place came the first number of "Bleak House." Charlotte found it difficult to believe that where one of Thackeray's books sold, five by this Mr. Dickens found purchasers. The Chancery part was good, to be sure, but when the tale

became autobiographical, it bored her—and Miss Esther Summerson was 'weak and twaddling.'

"An amiable nature faithfully rendered but in caricature," said Charlotte sternly, and suddenly she wished to return to "Villette"; incredible to think that four months had elapsed since she put pen to paper.

Looking at Ellen she pitied her, for Ellen's mother was old and frail; her brothers grasping. There must be loneliness for Ellen in the future and she was not gifted; not to Ellen had Providence given the courage and capacity to carve a career for herself. *She* could never have pleaded with publishers for two long years. Turned introspective Charlotte reflected on what her own life would have been if she had not been endowed with the power of creation. She would have been as the raven weary of surveying the deluge and without an ark to which she might return. As it was, except in her darkest hours, she had ever a sustaining hope and a motive.

"I wish every woman in England had also a hope and a motive," she said with such passion as to startle Ellen who had been meditating as to how she could best introduce Mr. Taylor's name into the conversation. Surely Charlotte had heard from India recently?

But Charlotte had had no answer to the carefully composed epistle which she had written after hearing from Mr. Williams.

"N'importe," she told her friend valorously, "let the single take comfort. I have seen marriage defined as the state of twofold selfishness."

Ellen was shocked at her friend's cynicism.

"The doubtful future must be left to Providence,"

Charlotte assured her. "I groan, not because I am a single woman and likely to remain so, but because I am a *lonely* woman."

Tempted by the delusive promise of spring she returned to Haworth in February and "Villette" began to grow.

Ten years had elapsed since Charlotte had left Brussels, but her eyes saw again the old familiar sights. Ginevra Fanshawe, Père Silas, Paulina de Bassompierre took life, Monsieur Paul Emanuel, faulty, irascible, but great-hearted, walked beside her. Charlotte was happy; she wrote at fever-heat, courting exhaustion.

Then Keeper died, and seeing the faithful brindled head laid in a grave she felt that her last link with Emily had snapped, nor did Flossie's whimperings as she pattered about the house searching for her lost comrade ease Charlotte's pain.

Her illusive gift left her. She could no longer 'make out.' "Villette" came to a standstill and Charlotte was left to envy Lucy the happiness that seemed within her grasp.

Home duties, few as they were, and the fitful surveillance of Mr. Brontë racked her overstrained nerves. At all costs she must be alone and unwatched!

Taking her manuscript Charlotte fled to Filey and found a refuge in the lodgings she had occupied with Ellen after Anne's death.

She saw Anne's grave and drew peace from its peaceful setting. She walked on the sands and stood on the cliffs for hours watching the tawny waves and the long

line of white foam. On the Sunday she went to the shabby little church with greenish mould on the walls, and as she listened to the preacher some tone of his voice reminded her of Mr. Nicholls. She wished that he was with her—how they two would have smiled together when the singers in the gallery turned their backs on the congregation, and the congregation turned its back on the pulpit. Yes, it would have been comforting if Mr. Nicholls had been sitting beside her ready to offer a strong arm on the long way home.

Chapter XXXIV

LUCY SNOWE OR LUCY FROST?

Charlotte returned from Filey to find her father ill with a sudden attack of inflammation in one of his eyes and the doctor's diagnosis alarmed her. The eye was in a serious condition, but even more dangerous was the general state of the patient; Mr. Brontë was on the verge of a stroke. Charlotte watched him through the night and by morning allowed herself to hope that the tragedy had been averted. But Mr. Brontë was no easy patient; his belief that his eyesight was again threatened made it impossible to keep him calm and within a week the blow fell.

For two days he lay unconscious, the still active mind imprisoned within a partially paralysed body, and in an hour when she was driven out of that terrible sick-room Charlotte sent a hasty note to Cornhill suggesting that no announcement should be made concerning her forthcoming book until the finished manuscript was safely delivered. She could not work while nursing her father and his state varied from day to day although the doctor assured her that there was no immediate anxiety; Mr. Brontë might live for several years.

Miss Wooler wrote in sympathetic vein and sent an offering of chemises adorned with such costly, beautifully stitched cambric frills that they gave Charlotte serious concern when she came to wear them; Ellen

offered to come and share the nursing, but Charlotte answered that she could carry the burden alone.

Life was a battle, she told herself as she strove to calm the irritable outbursts that alternated between Mr. Brontë's fits of despondency, and the necessary weapons were courage and submission.

The future appalled her as she visualized the alternative possibilities: her father might recover to the extent of being able to take up the greater part of his duties once more; he might suffer another attack and lie helpless for years; he might die. In any case she saw herself alone, and solitude had become as a canker.

The hot August passed, but in September, while the invalid was definitely better, Tabitha fell ill and Charlotte had to struggle through influenza; she could take but feeble interest when a one-volume "Shirley" arrived although the bantling looked 'very respectable in her new attire.'

Her slack energies were exhausted in the swift letters that passed between Brookroyd and Haworth Parsonage and she tried to arouse herself to an interest in Ellen's family affairs, but the resistless urge to create was upon her and she could find no real happiness down any other path. She read a good deal and gave cool entertainment to the uninvited, unwelcome guests who occasionally descended upon 'Currer Bell.' As an antidote she received Ellen (who had contrived to secure the Haworth gig) for a week, and her friend's company inspired her to turn to "Villette" in a spurt of energy.

'Be an honest critic,' she wrote to Mr. Smith when dispatching the first two volumes, 'and tell Mr. Wil-

liams to be unsparing—not that I am likely to alter anything,' she added truthfully, 'but I want to know his opinions and yours.'

Over "Jane Eyre" there had been family consultations, and two-thirds of "Shirley" had been written with sisterly encouragement, but "Villette" had had to make its solitary way and Charlotte was hungering to hear some expression of opinion.

While waiting she worked on steadily with the end clear in her mind. Lucy must not marry Dr. John—he was far too youthful, handsome, bright-spirited and sweet-tempered a bridegroom for Lucy Snowe. Dr. John must draw a prize in life's lottery, 'a young and pretty wife,' said Charlotte, looking at herself in the mirror. Lucy should wed the 'Professor, a man in whom there was much to forgive and much to put up with.' Then doubt assailed her. Should Lucy's surname be *Snowe,* or *Frost?* Now she inclined to one, now to the other. It must be something chilly, of that Charlotte was sure, for Lucy had about her an external coldness; but the surname should not signify strength, for Lucy was weak and even morbid at times. Yes, she was correctly drawn. Charlotte knew. She herself had lived forlorn in a foreign land and had fled to the confessional in the semi-delirium of grief and illness; there she was on sure ground.

She wrote feverishly and, to the jangle of St. Michael's bells, created the little house Monsieur Paul arranged for Lucy; 'its delicate walls were tinged like a blush, its floors were waxed but a square of brilliant carpet covered the centre of the salon. The small round table shone like the mirror over the hearth . . . there

were ornaments in pretty china, a work-box'; she added a glass filled with violets.

'"Pretty, pretty place," said Lucy.

'Monsieur Paul smiled.' . . .

Charlotte's pencil flew.

And now she and he were sitting on the little balcony: 'Monsieur Paul talked to me. His voice was so modulated that it mixed harmoniously with the silver whispers, the gusts, the musical sighs in which a light breeze, the fountain and foliage intoned their lulling vesper. . . . Our meal was simple; chocolate, the rolls, the plate of fresh summer fruit, cherries and strawberries bedded in green leaves, formed the whole; but it was what we both liked better than a feast and I took inexpressible delight in tending Monsieur Paul. . . .

'"*Lucy, take my love* . . . One day share my life . . . Be my dearest, first on earth . . ." These words caressed my ear.'

Charlotte stopped. Should Lucy Snowe have that which had been denied to herself. She hesitated and wrote a few more lines.

'We parted: he gave me his pledge and then his farewell . . . We parted; the next day he sailed . . . Man cannot prophesy. Love is no oracle!

'Monsieur Emanuel was away three years. . . .

* * *

'Monsieur Paul Emanuel's return was fixed. It is Autumn; he is to be with me ere the mists of November come. The skies hang full and dark—a wrack sails from the west; the clouds cast themselves into strange

forms—arches and broad radiations. There rise resplendent mornings, glorious, royal, purple as a monarch in his state; the heavens are one flame; so wild are they, they rival battle at its thickest—so bloody, they shame Victory in her pride.

'I know some signs of the sky; I have noted them ever since childhood. God watch that sail! Oh, guard it!

'The wind shifts to the west. Peace, peace, Banshee (keening at every window)! It will rise—it will swell—it shrieks out long; wander as I may through the house this night I cannot lull the blast. The advancing hours make it strong; by midnight all sleepless watchers hear and fear a wild, south-west storm.

'That storm roared, frenzies for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wreckage; it did not lull until the deeps had gorged their full of sustenance. Not till the destroying angel of tempest had achieved his perfect work would he fold the wings whose waft was thunder—the tremor of whose plumes was storm.'

Exhausted by her own emotions Charlotte stopped. Mr. Brontë had entered the room and was standing beside her as she pushed the paper aside.

"Is it finished, Charlotte?"

"Yes, Papa, I think so," she answered, still so imaginatively disturbed as to be scarcely conscious of her own words.

"Will it please your public?" asked Mr. Brontë, leaning heavily on the table.

"I—I don't know."

"You have aroused expectation, Charlotte. There

will be advertisements, 'New novel by Currer Bell' . . . 'New work by the Author of "Jane Eyre."'

"What have you given them, my daughter? I can advise you."

"I do not want advice, Papa."

His fierce eyes flamed as he looked down upon his daughter and she saw the veins throbbing in his temples, then he began to tremble.

"I wrote once, Charlotte," said Mr. Brontë, and her heart ached as his voice quavered. When he hectored she could withstand him, but in his weakness she gave him sympathy. Walking up and down the room he recited from his own long-forgotten verses:

> "Where Sin abounds, Religion dies
> And Virtue seeks her native skies!
> . . . . . .
> O Thou whose power resistless fills
> The boundless whole. Avert those ills
> We richly merit. Purge away
> The sins which on our vitals press . . ."

Poor Papa, poor disappointed old man who had once been 'Saucy Pat.' Charlotte listened as he talked of the 'poems' which were to have fired the world. Of the tales he had woven as he strode the moors; of the sermons he had preached to deaf ears.

"Give happiness to those you have created, Charlotte."

It was a strange, unreal scene; an hour later it seemed inconceivable that it could have happened. After all, could not each individual reader be left to settle the question of Paul Emanuel's fate according to the quality

of his own disposition? Drowning and matrimony were the alternatives. 'The merciful would choose the former and milder doom,' thought Charlotte—'drown him and put him out of his pain. The cruel-hearted will impale him on the second horn of the dilemma, marrying him without compunction to that—person—that—that individual—Lucy Snowe! . . .'

There was space on the last page and if, to her own mind, the book was finished, yet she could add a few enigmatic lines to please her father and those like him:

'There is enough said. Trouble no quiet heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of the great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life.'

The tired little fingers dropped the pencil and Charlotte slipped on to her knees. Whether the book was well done or ill, she did not know, but conscience could not reproach her, she had given of the best that was in her.

Chapter XXXV

"THE SCOUNDREL—THE BLACKGUARD!"

"Villette" was finished and Mr. Brontë seemed unusually well. Charlotte was free once more to think of herself and to read the completed "Esmond," a copy of which had arrived inscribed 'To Miss Brontë with W. M. Thackeray's grateful regard.' Thackeray himself was pleased with the tale, vowing that he was willing to leave it anywhere he went as his visiting-card. But he wished that he could have played 'first fiddle' all the time, as he believed he had done in the chapter where Henry Esmond returned to Lady Castlewood bringing his sheaves with him.

Charlotte rejoiced in the book. She found the Colonel 'very distinguished' in his Queen Anne garb, with periwig, sword and lace ruffles all complete. At last the Titan had put forth his full strength. In the first and second volumes there might be overmuch history and too little story; to her mind a work of fiction ought to be a work of creation, and the real introduced sparingly, but it was plain wholesome bread, she decided, far more wholesome and necessary than cake—yet who would like to see the brown loaf placed upon the table for dessert? Perhaps the author had realized his error, for in the third volume he has supplied a more reasonable

allowance of the brown bread, such a portion as gave substance, like the crumbs of bread in a well-made Christmas pudding.

Fresh from her own character-drawing she delighted in Beatrix 'clear in conception, vivid in delineation.' She saw the girl as one struggling against destiny but conquered by Fate. 'Proud, beautiful and sullied, she was born what she became, a King's mistress.' Charlotte decided to carry the precious third volume with her to Brookroyd for Ellen's benefit, later; perhaps she would lend it to Miss Wooler.

"Esmond" helped her through the time of suspense until she could hear from Cornhill. Would George Smith recognize himself as Dr. John Bretton? What had she written when Paulina Mary had asked Lucy for her thoughts on the doctor?

'"Do, *do* give me your real opinion of his character and disposition," said Paulina.

'"His character stands high, and deservedly high," Lucy answered.

'"And his disposition? Tell me about his disposition! You know him well?"

'"I know him pretty well."

'"You know his home side. You have seen him with his mother; speak of him as a son."

'"He is a fine hearted son; his mother's comfort and hope, her pride and pleasure."' . . .

There came no letter, merely a receipt and Charlotte was dismayed. What had struck her publishers mute? Could they be disappointed in "Villette"? She began packing hastily preparatory to a descent on Cornhill, but Sunday's post saved her: Mr. Smith found Paulina

Mary an 'odd fascinating little creature,' Charlotte read on eagerly. . . .

"And the financial transaction?" asked Mr. Brontë with intrusive interest. "What amount are you to receive, Charlotte? It should be considerable."

"Five hundred pounds, Papa."

"It ought not to have been less than seven hundred," he exclaimed violently. In her heart Charlotte agreed with him, and his open disappointment robbed her success of its lustre.

"Five hundred pounds is not to be despised, Papa." she answered. "Have you a stamp you could lend me, please," she asked, opening her desk. "Ellen Nussey lent me a half-penny at the railway station to-day and I should like to return it."

"Mr. Nicholls to see the Master," announced Martha Brown, and unheeding his daughter's request Mr. Brontë retreated to his study that the interview with his curate might take place in private.

Until the door opened an hour or so later Charlotte forgot that Mr. Nicholls was in the house, then, instead of passing down the passage as usual he tapped at the dining-room door and entered.

One look at his strained face prepared her for a scene: 'It has come!' she thought and realized that for the fourth time a man was asking her to be his wife.

Mr. Nussey had been unperturbed; Mr. Brice—or was it Price?—eloquent on paper; Mr. Taylor had hardly reached his point; but there was no checking Mr. Nicholls who now stood trembling before her, stammering crude, incoherent sentences while nervous actions betrayed his doubt of her response.

Charlotte edged him gently through the door.

He had watched her with her father—he admired her courage—he had served as Jacob had served for Rachael—and he loved her. To wait longer without hope was beyond human endurance. Could she love him? Would she marry him?

"I did not know—I had not guessed!" said Charlotte, much shaken. "But oh, go—go! Papa may come at any moment!"

"I have waited and suffered for months—for years," said Mr. Nicholls more firmly. "I cannot go without an answer."

"To-morrow," promised Charlotte. "Please *go,* Mr. Nicholls."

"I must know now," reiterated Mr. Nicholls, standing his ground in a way that amazed her.

"Have you spoken to Papa, Mr. Nicholls?" asked Charlotte, her years dropping away from her.

"I—I dared not, Miss Brontë," Mr. Nicholls admitted miserably, and Charlotte edged him gently through the door.

"To-morrow—to-morrow," she repeated. "I must think—I must consider." Shutting him firmly out she leant against the door for a moment and was thankful to hear her suitor stumbling amongst the tombstones.

Gathering her courage Charlotte went to her father's study and Mr. Brontë looked up amazed at the unwonted intrusion. His daughter's little face was flushed, and her hands shook with nervous excitement as she reflected upon those other long past *affaires* and compared them with this. Henry Nussey's proposal had been one of calculated expediency after the vicar's

daughter had rejected his address, the Bryce-Price incident had left no scar on either side, Mr. Taylor's matrimonial advance had been cautious and a trifle indefinite; but there could be no doubt as to Mr. Nicholls's strictly honourable intentions and Charlotte suffered in his suffering. Her thoughts whirled; above all things she dreaded a scene and its possible ill-effects upon her father, yet she was unequal to circumlocution:

"Papa . . . Mr. Nicholls has asked me to marry him."

"The scoundrel—the blackguard!" said Mr. Brontë heavily.

Charlotte was stung. "You are unjust, Papa," she answered, trying to steady her voice.

"How dared that fellow with his beggarly stipend propose for the hand of my daughter!" went on Mr. Brontë with gathering wrath. "He is insolent in approaching the famous Currer Bell—Charlotte, he is after your money."

"Mr. Nicholls is not mercenary. . . . Mr. Nicholls loves me," said Charlotte, deeply hurt.

"Such a marriage would be degradation—you would be throwing yourself away and I will not have it. Should you marry at all, Charlotte, I expect it to be in a very different sphere. . . . Nicholls is a low, unprincipled, worthless fellow," shouted Mr. Brontë violently, "and I forbid you to have anything further to do with him."

"You have no right to apply such epithets to Mr. Nicholls, Papa," said Charlotte, white to the lips.

"I'll turn the fellow out of my parish—I'll have him unfrocked—I'll write to the Bishop!" Mr. Brontë's

eyes blazed and the veins on his temple throbbed alarmingly.

"Keep calm, Papa!" implored Charlotte in terror that he would be stricken with a second stroke before her eyes.

"Swear to me that you will never see the impudent Irish rascal again!" demanded her father.

"If I loved him your injustice would drive me to him," cried Charlotte, indignation triumphing over fear.

" 'With the ancient is wisdom and in length of days understanding,' " replied Mr. Brontë in the words of Job. "Have you forgotten that I am your father? Is it suitable that a daughter should rebuke a parent and a man of God? . . . 'I curse this snivelling traitor—this Judas . . .' "

"The curse causeless shall not come," interrupted Charlotte.

" 'And I will set my face against that man and will cut him off from among his own people . . . And I will set my face against that man and against his family and I will cut him off and all that go awhoring after him to commit whoredom with Moloch from among their peoples,' " chanted Mr. Brontë.

"Papa! Oh, Papa!" cried Charlotte, outraged in spirit and hurt physically as her father grasped her thin shoulder.

" 'Woe unto him that draw iniquity with cords of vanity. . . . Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. . . . Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight.' " . . .

Charlotte waited, helpless in the vice-like grip of her father's gnarled hands.

" 'Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness and their blossom shall go up as dust because they have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts and despised the word of a Holy one of Israel!' "

"Let me go, Papa."

"Dismiss this presumptuous fool."

Charlotte did not answer, and still holding his daughter with one hand Mr. Brontë began to turn over the leaves of the Bible which was never far from his chair.

The fierce voice began again: "Listen to the words of the Lord!

" 'And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me I will bring seven times more plagues unto you according to your sins.

" 'And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me:

" 'Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins.

" 'And I will bring a sword upon you that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant. . . .

" 'And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me:

" 'Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury: and I, even I will chastise you seven times for your sins.' " . . .

The hard, relentless voice went on, but Charlotte heard no more. She watched the eyes that grew more bloodshot, and the veins quivering like whipcords. Death, or worse than death hovered near her father.

His fierce will carried him to the end of the chapter: " 'These are the statutes and judgments and laws which the Lord made between him and the children of Israel in Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses.' " . . .

"Papa! To-morrow I will refuse Mr. Nicholls quite definitely," she promised.

"Pray, Charlotte, pray!" said Mr. Brontë, forcing her to the ground.

Chapter XXXVI

MR. NICHOLLS IS DISMISSED

Charlotte wrote her letter of dismissal which was delivered by Martha Brown together with a note from Mr. Brontë, and presently the village seemed to have gathered a more or less accurate account of the happenings within its midst. Returning from an afternoon 'off,' some days later, Martha reported to Tabby that Mr. Nicholls was refusing his food and 'groaning awful' in the night. She added that her father would like to shoot the curate for all the trouble he was causing.

Meetings between Mr. Brontë and Mr. Nicholls were avoided by both men, and the latter arranged for a substitute to take his occasional duty, but there was a coming and going of messengers with letters, for Mr. Nicholls sent in his resignation—and then asked leave to withdraw it. Mr. Brontë was willing to agree, but on conditions. The curate must give a written undertaking that the obnoxious suggestion of a marriage between himself and Miss Brontë would never again be broached —and Arthur Bell Nicholls would give no such guarantee. Meanwhile Charlotte moved about the parsonage white-faced and anxious.

It was a relief to everyone when she left for London, ostensibly to see "Villette" through the press.

Charlotte was now sufficiently at home with the

Smiths to suggest what she would like to do, and while her choice often amused them they smoothed her path to Newgate, Pentonville and Bethlem—"Surely a little gloomy, my dear!" said kind Mrs. Smith, and was relieved when on the Sunday her guest asked for nothing more depressing than service at the Foundling Hospital.

In the hours when Charlotte, having corrected her proofs, sat knitting silently beside the fire her hostess would tell her the latest literary news; of Dickens's recent publication and the reception of "Esmond" by the critics, some of whom had viewed the book none too favourably.

"I saw that 'The Times' had shown its teeth with a courteously malignant grin which seems to say that it never forsakes a grudge," said Charlotte with some concern. The "Thunderer" had trounced her soundly in regard to "Shirley" while she was on a former visit and her hosts had tried to hide the newspaper.

Remembering this, Mrs. Smith hastily turned the conversation to Mr. Taylor's Indian experiences, and Charlotte knitted without comment.

Mr. Taylor's name was mentioned frequently during her sojourn and by the end of the visit Charlotte could tell herself that she had been wise in checking the little man's tentative offer of heart and hand. It seemed that the Indian climate was affecting his nerves and temper, and that, though his probity and usefulness were praised, men were finding him, like Carlyle, 'gey ill to live with.' What would he become in five years' time? Yes, she had had an escape, always supposing that Mr. Taylor's advance had indicated matrimony.

It was fortunate that she was in a *milieu* which supplied her with varied material for thought since Mr. Brontë's letters were frequent and all to the same effect; if the desired promise was withheld by the curate then it must be exacted from Charlotte.

"Villette" appeared and had a more favourable reception than Charlotte had dared to hope. Secrecy was a thing of the past and presentation copies were sent off to a group of friends including Ellen Nussey, Miss Wooler and Miss Martineau, from whom Charlotte claimed the fulfilment of a promise given long since:

> I know that you will give me your thoughts upon my book as frankly as if you spoke to some near relative whose good you preferred to her gratification [wrote Charlotte] I wince under the pain of condemnation, like any other weak structure of flesh and blood, but I love, I honour, I kneel to Truth! Let her smite me on one cheek —good—the tears may spring to the eyes—but courage, there is the other side; hit again right sharply.

She waited. What would Harriet Martineau have to say of Madame Beck, for whom Madame Heger had served as a prototype (as she had for Zoraïde Reuter in "The Professor"), or Lucy Snowe burying her cherished letters amid the roots of old Methuselah . . . of Paul Emanuel?

"*Mon maître!*" said Charlotte. But no; she did not want Constantin Heger to read "Villette." Precautions must be taken so that it should not appear in translation.

The success of the new book was assured before Mr. Smith put Charlotte into her train with a promise to forward any further reviews.

"Pray do not withhold any, whatever their animus," begged Charlotte. "I like to see satisfactory notices—especially I like to carry them to my father—but *I* must see such as are uncomplimentary or hostile. It is in these that I best read public opinion."

"Your remarks on Romanism will probably draw some mark of displeasure from the High Church party," Mr. Smith warned her.

"No accusation will oppress me when it is not supported by the inward evidence of Conscience and Reason," answered Charlotte firmly. "In any case I want to know what really is. To shun examination into the dangerous and disagreeable is cowardly."

Mr. Smith smiled at the rigid little figure as the train moved off. The portrait of himself as "Dr. John" had touched as well as amused him; he had a shrewd idea of Miss Brontë's extraordinarily limited knowledge of men—her father—her brother—the curates, superficially—Monsieur Heger seen from the viewpoint of an overwrought schoolgirl of dangerously mature age, distant glimpses of whatsoever fathers, brothers and lovers her few friends possessed—and himself. Yet out of this material she had created men and women who had stirred the literary world. Yorkshire born, of blended Irish and Cornish stock, whence had come the genius of the Brontë group?

He liked to think of George Eliot's enthusiasm: "'Villette,' 'Villette'!" she had cried at an evening party. "Have you read it? I have only just returned to a sense of the real world about me; it is a still more wonderful book than 'Jane Eyre,'" she added, forgetful of an earlier expression of opinions.

Yes, George Lewes had read it and could describe the author 'a little, plain, provincial sickly-looking old maid.'

"Yet with wit and power in her books," said George Eliot, neither she nor Lewes had noticed the young publisher as they edged their way through the crowd.

What next would the strange little woman send to Cornhill? he wondered now as he left the railway-station.

Charlotte, too, was thinking of comments occasioned by "Villette"; a panegyric from Mrs. Gaskell and a charming letter from an amateur critic. What matter that the "Guardian" found Currer Bell's female characters 'lacking in gentility'?

Then, too, she had been inundated by a flood of letters all imploring her to assure anxious readers of the fate of Paul Emanuel. One pressed to know if he were sketched from life, the writer having hitherto been in love with Jane Austen's Mr. Knightley had now transferred her allegiance and felt that she must remain for ever single if Monsieur Paul had no living counterpart.

As for the newspapers Charlotte meditated on a paragraph in the "Christian Remembrancer" and its pronouncement that the author of "Villette" had gained considerably in both amiability and propriety since she first presented herself to the world coarse, grumbling, sour—an alien (apparently) from society and amenable to none of its laws. Should she reply to the taunt or leave it unnoticed? Charlotte ran over the heads of a letter of protest in which mention should be made of her circumstances, the poverty of an isolated parsonage, a father now past three-score and ten threatened once

again with loss of sight, she the only survivor of a family of six. After all, thought Charlotte bitterly, if retirement were her duty the glimpses she had had of the great world had not made her particularly desirous to be of it, but such disinclination was no just cause for reproach, 'an alien from society' indeed!

With an effort she turned her thoughts to other matters. Uncertain as to her father's present attitude she had asked Ellen Nussey to join her at Leeds and spend a few days at the parsonage. Would Martha have things comfortable? Had Tabitha given her underling the tablecloth for the dining-room table? She hoped the pair had cooked a nice piece of boiled ham for supper—it would come in well for breakfast in the morning, too.

Ellen was waiting, smiling, round-faced and happy, eager to pour out uncritical admiration of "Villette," eager, too, to ask Charlotte's advice as to whether she should become an unpaid companion on no better financial security than promise of a legacy. It was surprising how short was the distance to Haworth when travelled in Ellen's company.

The tablecloth was on the table, the ham well cooked, and Mr. Brontë seemed to have forgotten *l'affaire* Nicholls in his interest in the progress of his daughter's last book, to the success of which he felt that he had contributed materially.

"I do not know whether your publisher is in the habit of canvassing the suffrage of the provincial press," he explained to Charlotte, "but I have suggested to Mr. Smith that a copy of 'Villette' might be placed advantageously with the 'Leeds Mercury' since I am

not only an old subscriber to that newspaper, but have occasionally contributed to its columns."

"Thank you, Papa," said Charlotte.

Ellen's visit was a success. She took a genuine interest in whatever reviews she was permitted to read, and her presence helped to soothe Charlotte's nervousness when the Bishop of Ripon decided to visit the parsonage, she being practical where Charlotte was not.

"One *must* prepare for a bishop, whatever he may say about giving no trouble," said Ellen wisely, and suggested that a woman should be brought in from the village to help Martha, while she, herself, hastened her departure in order to select the ecclesiastical dessert in Leeds where the choice would be wide.

It was fortunate that Charlotte was left with work to do, for no sooner had Ellen departed than the anxiously expected letter arrived from Miss Martineau, and with it a "Daily News" review which was recognizable as a Martineau production.

"No, no, *no!*" cried Charlotte as she read the printed columns. "No, no, *no!*" she cried again reading the letter in which Miss Martineau had striven to keep the promise which had been demanded of her at the first meeting:

> I do not like the love [she wrote], either the kind or the degree of it, and its prevalence in this book (and effect on the action of it) help to explain the passages in the reviews which you consulted me about; they seem to afford *some* foundation for the criticism offered.

"I know what *love* is," cried Charlotte hotly. . . . "If man or woman should be ashamed of feeling love,

as I understand it, then there is nothing right, noble, faithful, truthful and unselfish in this world. . . . How can she write to me like this?" Snatching a red pencil she scored down the most objectionable passages in the review:

All the female characters are full of one thing—love . . . from the child of six at the opening . . . to the last page, and so dominant is this idea, so incessant is the writer's tendency to describe the need of being loved that the heroine (who tells her own story) leaves the reader, at last, under the uncomfortable impression of her having either entertained a double love, or allowed one to supersede another without notification or transition.

It was not thus in real life, argued Miss Martineau, and Charlotte's pencil slashed and slashed again.

There are substantial heartfelt interests for women of all ages, and, under ordinary circumstances, quite apart from love. . . .

There spoke the sensible, grey-haired woman who had talked with Charlotte at The Knoll and dismissed her own solitary love affair in a brief sentence.

Now the outraged author seized her pen. Since Miss Martineau showed a spirit so strangely and unexpectedly acrimonious she must be told that the gulf of difference between them was so wide and deep, and the bridge of union so slight, that further intercourse would be both perilous and inadvisable. She would be angry, no doubt, thought Charlotte, and her anger might last, but she must swallow the pill. 'Never, never again will I meet her on the old terms!'

Charlotte's trembling hands sealed the letter of protest which ended a friendship begun too hopefully, and Tabitha called her to inspect the room Martha had prepared for the bishop.

Emily and Anne were dead, and in her loneliness Charlotte had sought understanding in an outsider. Never again would she expect response, and, in future, gentle should be the strain she would place on frail human nature! Locking away the offending review she rose from her desk:

"Yes, Tabby, I'm coming, Tabby!"

Chapter XXXVII

HOLY COMMUNION

The Keighley carrier delivered the dessert as selected by Ellen and the Bishop arrived, a benign little bishop with a quite surprising knowledge of the works of Currer Bell.

The curates were invited to supper, Mr. Nicholls being included perforce. He looked so dejected that Charlotte's heart was touched till a note of temper in his voice when he disagreed with his host frightened her.

'If he be a good man at bottom it is a sad thing that nature has not given him the faculty to put goodness into a more attractive form,' she decided, and avoided speaking to him when he lingered behind the others. Perhaps it was as well, for Martha was on the alert and, peeping from her kitchen door, shouted into Tabby's ear that that 'some mak' of a clergyman was casting flaysome looks about.'

"Hold ya' tongue, Martha, ma' girl," said Tabby.

Other difficult encounters followed. One night Mr. Nicholls dodged Charlotte up the lane after evening service. She hurried in breathless, leaving him among the tombstones.

When rumour reached the parsonage that Mr. Nicholls had secured a curacy elsewhere and would be leaving the district shortly Charlotte was thankful, feel-

ing the present position to be untenable. Mr. Brontë still ignored his assistant and Martha reported that Mr. Nicholls spent his time sitting drearily in his rooms at the sexton's cottage, except on the rare occasions when Flossie escaped parsonage surveillance and enticed him to take her for a walk; he was ill, miserable, and so gloomy that his fellow curates shunned him.

Charlotte could not avoid hearing some of Martha's tales and she lay awake at night wondering whether Mr. Nicholls's behaviour was the result of chagrin or love. Was she losing the most precious gem life could offer—or was she escaping the yoke of a morose temper? She could not tell, and, doubting, conscience forbade her to oppose her father's will although that will was enforced with bitter, unreasoning prejudice.

Time—or Mr. Nicholls—must make the next move. For Charlotte's part she would escape when she could, not to Miss Martineau who had poured coals of fire by inviting her to Ambleside ('The antagonism of our natures is too serious a thing to be trifled with,' thought Charlotte) but to Ellen Nussey.

Perhaps by the time she returned Mr. Nicholls would have left Haworth.

Spring touched the moors with magic fingers and Mr. Nicholls was still to be seen in the village although as Whitsuntide approached rumour had it that he was going 'next week.'

Charlotte learnt that in her absence the Churchwardens had called a meeting to interrogate the unfortunate curate as to his reasons for leaving. Was it owing to Mr. Brontë's fault or his own?

"My own," said Arthur Bell Nicholls briefly.

"Do you blame Mr. Brontë?" asked a blunt Yorkshire farmer.

"No."

"Are you leaving by your own desire?"

"No," Mr. Nicholls assured the group. "It gives me great pain to go." But he would give no details and the meeting broke up.

Feeling veered to the curate's side when it was reported that Miss Brontë had 'refused him with disdain.'

And now the parishioners were getting up a subscription on his behalf and groups at the street corner discussed what form the testimonial should take. Those in whose eyes the curate found no favour pointed out that he was not without blame, in that, when Mr. Brontë had addressed him at a recent tea-meeting where the two had met face to face, he had turned away leaving 't'parson' unanswered; Charlotte was much perturbed.

On Whit-Sunday, Mr. Nicholls's last day in Haworth, Mr. Brontë found himself unable to take the service and the curate was left to officiate.

Charlotte watched him from the corner of her pew and never before had she realized more clearly the beauty of the prayer of consecration and the symbolic act of breaking the Bread than now when Mr. Nicholls uttered the words and bowed his head before the altar.

Her turn came and she advanced to take the sacrament from his hands for the last time, realizing only as she knelt that in coming she had tried him too far.

"The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died

for thee, and feed on Him in thy heart, by faith, with thanksgiving." His hands shook as they touched hers.

"The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul—unto everlasting—life!" . . .

Mr. Nicholls's voice faltered to a full stop. He could not continue and there was an agonizing pause. A woman sobbed and Charlotte felt her own tears rising as she waited. Then, with a splendid effort, he continued to the end:

"Drink this in remembrance that Christ's Blood was shed for thee and be thankful . . ."

The Lord's prayer seemed to give him a fresh access of strength and his voice rang through the church as he uttered the Benediction:

"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord: and the blessing of God Almighty the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you always."

"Amen!" said Charlotte softly. She remained in her pew while the congregation filed out, knowing herself to be too much shaken for casual speech.

Before nightfall Mr. Brontë had been told of the episode and poured forth such abuse that Charlotte fled to her bedroom. 'The injustice of it!' she thought, holding her aching head. Mr. Nicholls had offered his love to a lonely woman, was that a fault or a sin deserving of insult? 'But compassion or relenting is no more to be looked for from Papa than sap from firewood.'

In thought she followed Mr. Nicholls back to his dreary lodging. To how few had he attached himself during the years at Haworth, and yet what depth of feeling he had betrayed that morning; he reminded her of a stream running strongly through an underground channel. She could not forget his voice nor the shamed pain in his eyes when he faltered in the service. Yet she might not go to him, nor speak to him, nor comfort him one whit. 'Unchristian!' she decided and sighed, reflecting that neither of the two men concerned was amenable to reason.

On the morrow Mr. Nicholls called at the parsonage to leave some official papers and bid a formal good-bye. It was obvious that he came determined to see Charlotte, for when Tabitha opened the door he brushed past her into the dining-room instead of entering the study—but the room was empty except for Martha who was on her knees cleaning paint.

"T'marster's in t'study, Mr. Nicholls," said Tabitha shrilly, and Charlotte, lurking on the landing above, heard the curate's retreat.

The study interview was brief and Charlotte was watching from an upper window when Mr. Nicholls left the house. He paused so long at the little gate that she gathered courage to run down to him.

Both were too disturbed to be either self-conscious or articulate. He asked for encouragement, she for information as to where he was going, and neither satisfied the other. It was an unsatisfactory parting and to Charlotte seemed the worse in that she saw no prospect of hearing anything of him in the future, unless some stray thread of intelligence drifted to her through the

agency of another curate. She hoped he had understood that she was not cruelly blind to the love he had offered her. . . .

That night Mr. Brontë read from Proverbs with a grim emphasis:

. . . "A fool despiseth his father's instructions, but he that regardeth reproof is prudent. . . . The lips of the wise disperse knowledge but the heart of the foolish doeth not so. . . . Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way and he that hateth reproof shall *die!*"

Chapter XXXVIII

MRS. GASKELL LISTENS

The difficult weeks dragged by. Charlotte contracted flu', her father's health grew worse and the new curate was not a success. Only good reviews, books from Cornhill, and the anticipation of a visit from Mrs. Gaskell, helped Charlotte through the worst days; but it was September before her visitor materialized and if the fading heather was still purple on the moors it was often hidden in a drizzling rain.

Mrs. Gaskell was the first literary guest to enter the parsonage and she realized, as no other had done, the atmosphere that had surrounded the trio of sisters. The four-mile-long scrambling drive from Keighley between the lines of hills was a suitable introduction to the square grey house behind the greyer church, around which the crowded gravestones pressed like serried ranks of warriors, all set above a straggling, narrow street which was so steep that the paving stones had to be placed endways in order to give slipping horses a precarious foothold.

'No wonder Branwell was driven to drink and drugs, no wonder Emily had written in sombre vein,' thought Mrs. Gaskell, standing at her window and trying vainly to count the tombstones—the only view afforded her other than the Church Tower.

The dining-room was warm, the whole house exquisitely neat, but its silence spelt desolation. The ticking of the clock, the buzz of a fly on a window-pane seemed startling sounds amid the stillness. Mr. Brontë was seventy-six and Tabby eighty-two; blessed indeed was the gift that enabled Charlotte Brontë's spirit to escape into an imaginary world.

The friends walked walks against the wind on the moor, stretching behind the house and lost itself among the sinuous hills, which Mrs. Gaskell vowed must reach even to the North Pole; they talked of "Ruth" now well on her way to fame, and of "Cranford" which Charlotte had found 'pleasurable reading, pithy, penetrating, shrewd, yet kind and gentle.' But when Mrs. Gaskell turned the conversation to Charlotte's own works she found herself on dangerous ground:

"No," said Charlotte, straining her eyes over the shadowy spaces, "there was no joy for me in 'Jane's' success, it was all lost in watching Emily die."

Safer far to talk of literary methods! For her writings Charlotte had the long hours after the rest of the household were abed. Having seen Mrs. Gaskell as the centre of a busy home, she puzzled that the other could find time for literary effort.

"When you sit down to write, knowing that there will come a score of interruptions, how can you isolate yourself from all your ties and their sweet associations so as to be your *own woman,* uninfluenced, unswayed by the consciousness of how your work may affect other minds?" she asked.

It was a nice problem and Mrs. Gaskell was spared an answer by the entrance of Mr. Brontë who, to do

honour to the guest, was to join them at tea. He paid her laboured, old-fashioned compliments, pronounced her books to be 'moral and interesting literary productions' and smiled benignly as he talked, but an occasional glare from the stern eyes behind the spectacles warned her that her host's suavity was on the balance. She wondered whether the deadly little pistol he fired matutinally was lying in his sagging pocket, and Mr. Brontë's retirement to his own room gave her genuine relief.

Mrs. Gaskell drew up her chair to the fire as did Charlotte and the two talked desultorily. Charlotte, whose thoughts were on her own affairs, showed herself fatalistic by arguing that some were appointed to sorrow and grief, that it did not fall to all to have their lines set in pleasant places and that the sooner those condemned to travel by rough paths realized God's will concerning them, the sooner they would moderate their expectations, leave hope to those of a different doom, and seek patience and resignation as the virtues they were to cultivate.

Mrs. Gaskell would not agree, and was the more emphatic in her repudiation of the doctrine because she had a suspicion that something lay behind Charlotte's words. Taking a wide view she considered that human lots were more equal than they seemed, to some happiness and sorrow came in strong patches of light and shade, while in the lives of others they were blended throughout.

Charlotte shook her head: "I am striving to school myself against ever again anticipating any pleasure," she answered austerely. "Better to be brave and sub-

mit, believing that there is some good reason—better to acknowledge the bitter truth and face it fortified by faith!"

What sacrifice was her little hostess meditating, wondered Mrs. Gaskell?

The days were oddly alike. In the mornings Charlotte was busy with household tasks; in the afternoons the two would walk, weather permitting; at six came supper and at half-past eight prayers. By nine all the household were in bed except the friends who talked by the fireside; at ten o'clock Charlotte lighted her guest upstairs, then returned to the dining-room for the slow monotonous walk without which she could not hope to sleep.

Listening to the light-falling footsteps in the silent house, and knowing how the three sisters had walked night after night through the years, Mrs. Gaskell's strained imagination saw the ghosts of the dead following the lonely little figure walking on, and on, to the rhythmic ticking of the clock.

When the visit ended the two were friends for life. Having watched Mrs. Gaskell's departure Charlotte reentered the house feeling as if the shutters had been closed and the blinds let down; all day she was aware of a sense of loss.

Mrs. Gaskell's easy presence had given her a breathing space, for the atmosphere of the parsonage was still dangerous. Not having yielded the promise her father desired, Charlotte was under suspicion, and when the position was aggravated by one of her frequent headaches, or an attack of indigestion, the tension seemed unbearable. She tried to occupy herself with

literary work and succeeded in drafting the first chapters of a new novel under the provisional title of "Emma," wherein a child passing under the name of Matilda Fitzgibbon was brought by her father to the unremuneratively select school at Fushia Lodge which was kept by the Misses Wilcox who had been 'finished' abroad.

For a space all was to go well with Matilda, so thought Charlotte Brontë. She should be received and petted as an heiress, honoured with a share of Miss Wilcox's own bed, and shown off as the prize pupil; then Tragedy would overwhelm her when it was discovered that the child had been abandoned by her putative father.

Charlotte's pencil flew. Matilda was interrogated, lost her head and fainted, a Mr. Ellen appeared in the guise of a rescuer and in the background waited the widowed Mrs. Chalfont who was 'neither young nor old.'

Tabitha entered bringing the letters, among them one from Mr. Nicholls, and Charlotte slipped the sheets of manuscript into her little walnut desk.

Correspondence with Mr. Nicholls was dangerous; should it be discovered there would be a terrible outburst of temper on Mr. Brontë's part, and, too, Charlotte hated deception. For some time she had left the letters unanswered, but Mr. Nicholls continued to write and in a lonely hour she had weakened, with the result that the determined wooer had ventured into the prohibited neighbourhood. Charlotte met him perforce, urged submission and preached the fatalistic doctrine she had rehearsed to Mrs. Gaskell. Mr. Nicholls

answered that the sight of her had comforted him much—and having much, he asked for more.

Charlotte fled and fled again, once to Ellen Nussey, and once to Miss Wooler at Hornsea, returning with a supply of courage that carried her through the ordeal of confession, and in the New Year Mr. Nicholls followed up a letter to Mr. Brontë by appearing in person, resolute in his demands for permission to pay occasional visits.

There were scenes, but Mr. Nicholls stood his ground, winning Charlotte's respect by his handling of the situation, and Mr. Brontë grudgingly assented to 'an acquaintance' between his daughter and his erst-while curate.

A foothold once gained, Mr. Nicholls climbed higher and Charlotte grew younger while "Emma" languished in the desk. As an author she felt a fraud, and when books and yet more books arrived from Cornhill wrote urging that such courtesies should cease—she would rather give them up than wear them out—but it was pleasant to walk through the village with Mr. Nicholls and see the dour smiles with which he was received. He might be taciturn, but when with him she drew strength from his strength and ever-watchful kindness; in his absences she hesitated remembering his sternness and his bigotry.

Charlotte had described Mr. Nicholls's prototype Marcarthey as one who would be upset for a week if he chanced to find himself under the same roof as a dissenter; now she pondered over Mr. Nicholls's prob-able attitude in regard to her friendship with the Gaskells. When Mr. Brontë suddenly announced that

he was giving legal notice to Mr. Nicholls's unfortunate and unsatisfactory successor, and that Nicholls might return to his duty in Haworth, Charlotte was in a mood to remember all her would-be fiancé's faults and none of his virtues.

Panic seized her when she knew that he was in the study and would most certainly expect an interview with her before he left the parsonage.

Tabitha, brushing up the hearth and moving with the stiffness of eighty-odd years, watched her mistress uneasily as she paced up and down.

"Shall I draw the curtains, Miss Charlotte?" asked the old woman with her hand behind her ear. "The wind's wild if it do be April."

Charlotte shook her head. "No, Tabitha, I like to watch the moon."

"Even you mumble when you speak these days," grumbled Tabby, turning up the lamp. "Sit down then, and get on with y'r knitting instead of wasting good light doing naught."

But Charlotte had brought out the rough oil painting of herself and her sisters which had been executed by Branwell in their youth and was looking at it earnestly.

"Better let me burn that trash," said Tabby grimly, but receiving no reply she left the room.

Charlotte touched the pictured faces; Emily in the background, Anne beside her, herself round-faced with high-piled hair and ringlets. As vividly as if it had been yesterday she remembered the hot afternoon when, after a last sitting, Branwell had flung the canvas aside in despair; now Branwell, Emily and Anne were dead and she waited alone.

The ringers were at work in St. Michael's and as the chimes rang out Charlotte remembered how she and her sisters had chosen the *noms de plume* under which they had won fame.

As Mr. Nicholls's wife Currer Bell would fade into Mrs. Arthur Bell Nicholls. She put the portrait away mechanically and stood listening to the ticking of the old clock which seemed almost vibrant in the lonely, silent house. "I can't bear it!" she cried suddenly.

Once, while staying at Ambleside, Charlotte had persuaded Miss Martineau to mesmerize her and the experience had served to increase her secret faith in her own gift of clairvoyance.

Now with her eyes fixed on the gleaming base of her ink-stand she sent out a deliberate cry:

"I am alone . . . I am desolate! *Mon maître,* will you not send me a message?"

She waited tensely.

"Mon maître! Have you no thought for your pupil to-night? . . . You who unlocked my heart and freed the gift imprisoned within me . . . Has no echo of my fame reached you—*mon maître—mon maître!"*

She waited, and as she waited, clear as if spoken by a human voice she received an answer.

"The—best—wine . . . turns to the sourest vinegar!" Charlotte repeated the sentence twice, first in puzzled bewilderment, then in passionate realization of its bitter meaning:

"The best wine turns to the sourest vinegar . . . Is that your last message to me, Constantin Heger? . . . Ah, no, no! It is not true . . . I have not grown

bitter . . . I am not soured. There is gold in my heart for the taking!"

She cowered into a chair and sat shaking till the sound of an opening door and footsteps in the passage forced her to a semblance of self-control.

Mr. Nicholls entered, and, seeing Charlotte's shrinking attitude, hesitated. When he spoke it was in a sentence taken from one of her own books:

"'It is dreary for women to sit by solitary fires and hear the nations praise them from afar.'"

With a sudden beat of the heart Charlotte realized that this man, at least, was not unmindful either of her loneliness or her fame. Still nerve-racked she answered slowly, scarcely conscious to whom she was speaking.

"Sometimes, when I awake in the morning and know that Solitude, Remembrance and Longing are to be my sole companions through the day, I carry a heavy heart."

"You are writing now?"

She thought of "Emma" lying abandoned in the desk: "I cannot—and there is nothing with which to fill the long days and longer nights."

"I too know loneliness and longing," said Arthur Bell Nicholls.

Charlotte's eyes were resting on the shining inkstand and she scarcely heard him: "How often do women sitting warm in their ingle-nooks send winged imagination wandering in dark waves," she said, and at her strained tone he made a sudden movement which caught her attention.

"It is bad to be quite alone—to have no one with

whom to talk over life's disappointments and laugh the crosses away," said Mr. Nicholls gently and held out his hands.

Charlotte moved forward in instinctive response, then stopped, checked by her old feeling of uncertainty. Love was a gem not to be lightly thrown aside, and yet what could she offer this man in return other than cool respect? . . . Once she had cried aloud that she was capable of loving 'with the finest fibre of her soul' . . . What had Edward Fairfax Rochester said to 'Jane'? "Every atom of your flesh is as dear to me as my own; in pain and sickness it would still be dear. . . . Your mind is my treasure." . . .

Oh, to be *first* with someone. Yet would it satisfy her to be first with a man who could not follow her intellectually, she asked herself with desperate honesty.

"Why do Care and Fear stand so close to Hope that I cannot see her for their Shadows?" she cried forlornly. "Love shivers in my heart like a suffering child in a cold cradle."

"Let my love hold your heart and warm your memories," said Mr. Nicholls, imprisoning the tiny hands which fluttered in his grasp like frightened birds.

"I *fear* love," answered Charlotte. "It is the bitterest thing we know. . . . It tortures through time."

"Ah no," he told her gravely. "Love is the sweetest, strongest, the most lasting of God's gifts. Come to me—make my happiness as I will make yours. . . . I have found you to-night friendless—cold"—he chafed her fingers gently—"comfortless. Come to me; I will guard, cherish and solace. There is love in my heart, Charlotte, and constancy in my resolve."

He was not a man of fine words and she knew that now he spoke with an effort. She believed him, yet some impulse made her struggle.

"Consider well before shutting yourself out from what should be a woman's chief happiness," he said as he freed her.

"'The best wine turns to the sourest vinegar!'" cried Charlotte wildly. "Oh, God, help the woman who is left to live passionately and alone."

"Remember this," said Mr. Nicholls, watching her closely. "We can get nothing worth keeping, not so much as a conviction or a principle, except from purifying pain or strengthening peril . . . I have loved you for eight years."

"Eight years!"

"Through eight years of loneliness—and difficulty."

"But," said Charlotte, moving hesitatingly towards him, "Papa needs me . . . He is old . . . frail . . . he may go blind again."

"I will give him service."

"You would stay here, refusing preferment?"

"Even that—for you."

Oh, he was good. Charlotte felt lightened of a burden that had weighed her down, yet still she hesitated.

"Papa will *never* consent."

"He will. He shall," said Mr. Nicholls with resolution. "But if not, does all virtue lie in the abnegation of self, Charlotte? I do not believe it. Undue humility breeds tyranny; weak concessions create selfishness. . . . Beware what you do. Each human being has his and her share of rights and it would be to the happiness of all of us if each knew his allotment and

held to it. Are my eight years to count as nothing?"

"You need me?"

"I need you. My loneliness is as deep as yours; my love is greater." He took her hands again and bent to kiss them. "Eight years!"

Charlotte found it startling to be enfolded in masculine arms, but, so enfolded, she forgot that she was no longer young.

Still dazed she waited alone while Mr. Nicholls interviewed her father. Consent was given, but as 'an expression of gratitude' Mr. Nicholls was expected to promise the support and consolation that Mr. Brontë felt he might require in his old age. The assurance was given and Charlotte knew that she need never fear the strain of a double loyalty; the man she was to marry was no dealer in profession without acts.

An hour after Mr. Nicholls had left her Mr. Brontë appeared looking strangely bowed and frail.

"Youth must be served," he told his daughter, forgetful of her thirty-eight years, "I have yielded my will to yours, but 'tis a poor match, Charlotte." He mounted the stairs murmuring to himself as he went: " 'For what hath man of all his labour and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?

" 'For all his days are sorrows and his travail, grief: yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night.' " . . .

He was unjust. Charlotte knew it, and yet she could have wept that in this, the most important act of her life, she, her father's only surviving child, should have so failed to satisfy his legitimate paternal pride.

She walked late that night, then alone by the dying

fire laid out the letters she had treasured for ten years. How little the scant pages had satisfied her hungry heart! Yet worn to illegibility, and written in the hand of the woman against whom her passion of resentment still smouldered, Charlotte touched the sheets gently, and memory fled to Brussels. Lucy Snowe was fortunate. She had given her treasure into the safe keeping of Methuselah, but where could Charlotte Brontë lay hers? Under Anne's stunted thorn bush? In a corner of the old churchyard or out on the wide moors? No, let the flames have them. She tore a page and offered it to the dying fire:

"Farewell, my dear master. May God guard you with special care and crown you with peculiar blessings!" said Charlotte, and speaking, knew that she could not burn her letters.

When she shut herself into her bedroom that night Charlotte felt sure that she would lie awake till dawn, but unconsciousness came swiftly although, like "Jane Eyre" on the eve of what should have been her wedding-day, she dreamed of wandering through the night carrying the burden of a wailing child. She struggled, climbing higher and higher; she slipped and there was a murmur of running water in her ears.

Tabitha's knock and the sound of the old woman's querulous voice aroused her from the stupor of fatigue.

"Yes, Tabby, yes. I have overslept," she called and looked around her in bewilderment, for across a chair was flung a bedraggled coat. She slipped out of bed, aching in every limb, and found her shoes and stockings as wet and muddy as the coat.

Where had she been? What had happened? Was the

burden she had carried through the night actual or imaginary, and, if real, where had she laid it? Charlotte sought for her letters; they were gone, and memory could give her no help.

Chapter XXXIX

'DEARLY BELOVED'

Charlotte went about her household duties. Meals were laid before her, she sent them away scarcely touched. Mr. Brontë summoned her to read to him and she heard her own voice flowing on hour after hour. Mr. Nicholls came and went and came again, the only solid human factor in her shaken world.

Gradually he contrived to lift her burdens; by slow degrees Mr. Brontë's hostility lessened.

Letters had to be written and congratulations began to arrive. Ellen Nussey, much thrilled, offered assistance in the matter of the trousseau for which, she insisted, a visit to Leeds was imperative, although the bride-elect protested that her purchases were to be neither 'expensive nor extensive.'

The east wind dropped and Charlotte's health began to improve. If the thrill of the first emotional hour had vanished, and she faced the future with deliberately subdued expectations, common sense told her that the engagement promised a modicum of happiness to all concerned. She resolved to make Mr. Nicholls a good wife and reflected that she had secured a permanent and reliable assistant for her father. It was possible to assure her Cornhill friends that the step she was taking was no hasty one. 'On the gentleman's side, at least, it

has been meditated for many years,' and her belief was that 'all will end for the best.'

'Scarcely the way a bride should write,' thought Mrs. Smith and felt vaguely sorrow for the frightened little author who had knitted beside her drawing-room fire.

Mr. Nicholls began to press for an early wedding and Charlotte protested—she must go to Ellen first and an invitation from Mrs. Gaskell had been accepted. Alas, this visit was hardly as successful as the first. Mrs. Gaskell's circle had widened, other authors appeared unexpectedly, and too often Currer Bell took refuge behind the window curtains. When caught she was dreadfully monosyllabic!

It was a relief to return home once more and she found much to do. Mr. Nicholls would need a study of his own, the peat-room must be cleared. She spent hours stitching at green and white curtains to match the new wallpaper, and the old table-cloth had to have a new border.

More exciting still wedding-cards had to be printed, though Charlotte stipulated that these should be very plain, with no ornamentation and just simple initials; Ellen Nussey had to be called upon to purchase suitable sealing-wax, nothing satisfactory being obtainable in Haworth. And there seemed no end to the number of Mr. Nicholls's parson friends; more envelopes, and yet more envelopes were required.

Then Mr. Nicholls wrote that he was ill and Charlotte flew into a fever of anxiety. She remembered her fiancé's rheumatic tendencies and saw him as a chronic invalid; it was an appalling possibility, but she

gathered her courage and vowed to stand by him come weal or woe.

Mr. Nicholls arrived, and startled by his looks Charlotte catechized him severely. What? Not rheumatism —merely an 'over-excited mind,' and the prospect of a few more weeks of bachelorship; Currer Bell was forgotten; Charlotte Brontë became wholly feminine, she rated her suitor and scoffed at men in general as amazing pieces of mechanism. 'There is not a female child above the age of eight but would rebuke you for this wilful nonsense,' she told him, and Mr. Nicholls saw a new Charlotte. She sent him off, bidding him not fret himself, yielded to his pleading for a June wedding, and promised to order yet more envelopes since even fifty seemed inadequate for his long list of friends. Her own she could have counted on the fingers of one hand, and no others but Miss Wooler and Ellen were to appear.

May passed. Mr. Brontë seized with leaden depression of the spirits complained of sudden deafness and the temporary curate made trouble. When Charlotte's frocks arrived from Halifax she was too busy to unpack them.

June was passing fast and the troublesome curate claimed a holiday. While Mr. Nicholls grappled with the problem of providing Mr. Brontë with a suitable substitute for the period of the honeymoon which he was not prepared to let anyone wrest from him, Charlotte made her last arrangements, ordered the wedding-breakfast and summoned her two friends.

When Ellen Nussey and Miss Wooler arrived (having shared a cab from the Devonshire Arms) they

found all in readiness and Mr. Nicholls installed under the roof of his best man ('Mr. Donne' of "Shirley").

Charlotte was tremulous but happy. Rarely had she looked less plain.

"Mr. Nicholls requires *knowing* to be *appreciated,*" she informed Miss Wooler. "Papa views the arrangement complacently and Mr. Nicholls seems deeply to feel the wish to comfort and sustain him. I am sure, from my knowledge of Mr. Nicholls's—of Arthur's—character that this is no mere transitory impulse but will be accepted steadily as a duty, and discharged tenderly, as an office of affection."

Miss Wooler patted Charlotte's hand seeing, not the eager little figure before her, but the Charlotte of twenty years before—a thin, shabby child, climbing out of a covered cart.

"At what hour is the ceremony, my dear?"

"Eight o'clock to-morrow morning and all *very* private," answered Charlotte.

Ellen was restive. Was Charlotte's wedding-gown exactly what it should be?

Charlotte produced the white embroidered muslin in all its pristine glory, and to go with it a lace mantle and a dainty white bonnet trimmed with green leaves.

"Very pretty indeed," said Miss Wooler, but Ellen's nose wrinkled and she demanded permission to rearrange the leaves.

"You shall look like a snowdrop," she promised.

Leaving her to her self-imposed task the other two talked softly, and Charlotte's one topic was Mr. Nicholls. "I hope that you will come to know him, my dear Miss Wooler, for he does not lose by closer

knowledge I assure you. A *little* unbending, perhaps," she admitted, "but persuadable and open to kind influence."

"What can one ask beyond reliability, truthfulness, faithfulness and—and affection?" said Miss Wooler, sitting erect, "and you have led me to understand that these characteristics are his." She jumped as Mr. Brontë opened the door and stood wavering in the entrance.

"Papa, surely it is not time for prayers?" exclaimed Charlotte.

"I shall not read prayers," said Mr. Brontë slowly. "I am going to bed and I shall not get up to-morrow morning."

"But Papa!—my wedding!"

"Hoity-toity, Mr. Brontë," exclaimed Miss Wooler, forgetting her usual deferential attitude. "What's all this? Have you forgotten that you are to give your daughter away?"

"I shall *not* get up to-morrow morning," reiterated Mr. Brontë distantly as he withdrew.

Ellen dropped the wedding-bonnet and the three women sat in silence listening to the heavy footfalls on the stone stairs. Then Miss Wooler, the deprecating guest, disappeared and in her place reigned the schoolmistress.

"Ellen Nussey, pick up that bonnet. Charlotte Brontë, give me your prayer-book." Both obeyed swiftly and the little old maid turned the leaves seeking the Holy Ordinance of Matrimony which begins 'Dearly beloved' and ends with 'amazement.'

. . . "'At the day appointed . . . the persons to be married shall come into the body of the Church with their friends,'" she read. Her spectacles fell off and she groped for them blindly . . . "'At which day of marriage if a man do allege and declare an impedi——'"

"No, no!" cried Ellen nervously.

"'If no impediment be alleged,'" read Miss Wooler, "'then shall the curate say unto the man: "Wilt thou have this women to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance." . . . Then shall the priest say unto the woman . . . "Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others keep thee only unto him so long as ye both shall live?"'"

"The woman shall answer 'I will'!" said Charlotte.

Still Miss Wooler read on: "'Then shall the minister say: "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" . . . Then shall they give their troth to each other in this manner, the minister receiving the woman at her father's *or friend's hands.*' I knew it!" she said, solemnly triumphant. "'Her *friend's* hands!' *I* will give you away, my dear Charlotte." . . .

But Charlotte was looking beyond the present: "'I take thee, Arthur, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, to cherish and obey—till death do us part.' Oh," she cried, looking from Miss Wooler to Ellen. "It is a strange, a perilous thing when a woman becomes a wife!"

EPILOGUE

CHARLOTTE BRONTË was married on the 29th of June 1854 and for a month Arthur Bell Nicholls claimed her undivided allegiance. He gave her a few days in Wales before carrying her through Dublin to Banagher, where, to Charlotte's amazement, people hastened to congratulate her upon her excellent fortune in securing 'one of the best gentlemen in the country'; it was a new point of view. Currer Bell faded out of sight and soon Charlotte was ready to accept the reiterated statement that Arthur Bell Nicholls, not Charlotte Brontë, had been condescending.

In all her thirty-eight years of life she had never before come first in any man's heart and she was feminine.

Should ever need arise she vowed to be as indulgent to her husband as he was now showing himself to her —and yet he had his masculine faults! Well trained to filial duty Charlotte would have hastened back to Haworth when Mr. Brontë wrote that he was ill, but Arthur Bell Nicholls was adamant; these weeks were his.

The strange month ended and the two turned homeward; housewifely cares extended their tentacles towards the bride.

'Have things ready for tea, on Tuesday,' she wrote to the parsonage servants, 'and there should be some

cold meat or ham as well. We shall probably miss dinner and Mr. Nicholls will want something.'

They arrived. Mr. Brontë seemed quite well and a new life began. Visitors came to perform their social duty to Mr. Nicholls's wife, forgetful of Currer Bell. Charlotte found herself returning calls, exchanging tea-drinkings and busy in a thousand feminine ways. It was strange to be wanted continually and to have a companion on her moorland walks; stranger still to take meek part in a village gathering whereat she heard her husband described as 'a consistent Christian and a kindly gentleman.' The truth of the phrase touched her; she remembered her own caustic moments and was amazed to think of her eight years' blindness.

A purple August faded into September. Ellen came and listened as Charlotte talked of 'my dear Arthur,' but Mr. Nicholls watched the friendship between the two with misgiving remembering the place Charlotte had won for herself in the literary world. Women were rash letter-writers and Charlotte was no whit wiser than the rest; Ellen must pledge herself to destroy Charlotte's correspondence or he would censor all she wrote.

Charlotte was amused at this belated effort to safeguard her from posterity, but Ellen, sore at the diverting of her friend's affections, changed her erstwhile good opinion and only gave the promise under duress; such promises need *not* be kept, she told herself.

November came in wild and stormy, but on a rare fine morning Arthur Nicholls carried his wife to see the waterfalls in spate. White and beautiful it raged

over the rocks and Charlotte vowed that she would not have missed such a sight for worlds. Rain drove them home and Charlotte caught cold.

Christmas came. "Almost six months since we were married!" said Charlotte. ('Mr. Nicholls' had become 'my dear boy.')

The two spent a few days with Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth who was urging Mr. Nicholls to accept a better living for the sake of his wife's health, but the promise to Mr. Brontë held them both bound to Haworth, and in the New Year Charlotte passed into the hands of a doctor.

Frail, no longer young, she learned that motherhood was before her: "I dare say I shall be glad some day, but now—I am so ill—so weary!"

Old Tabitha went first. They buried her in February when Charlotte was too ill to realize that the old woman had gone, and Mr. Nicholls could scarcely leave her for an hour.

'No kinder, better husband than mine, it seems to me, can there be in the world,' she wrote to a friend. 'I do not want now for kind companionship in health and the tenderest nursing in sickness.'

Failing fast and racked with pain Charlotte struggled back to consciousness to hear her husband praying for her life.

"Oh," she cried. "Surely He will not separate us. . . . We have been so happy!"

She died 31st March 1855.

The two men who had loved her each in his own

way took up life together in the grey and silent house. Charlotte Brontë had served her father well.

Autocrat to the last, Mr. Brontë lived on for six long years, and Arthur Bell Nichols held fast to his trust.